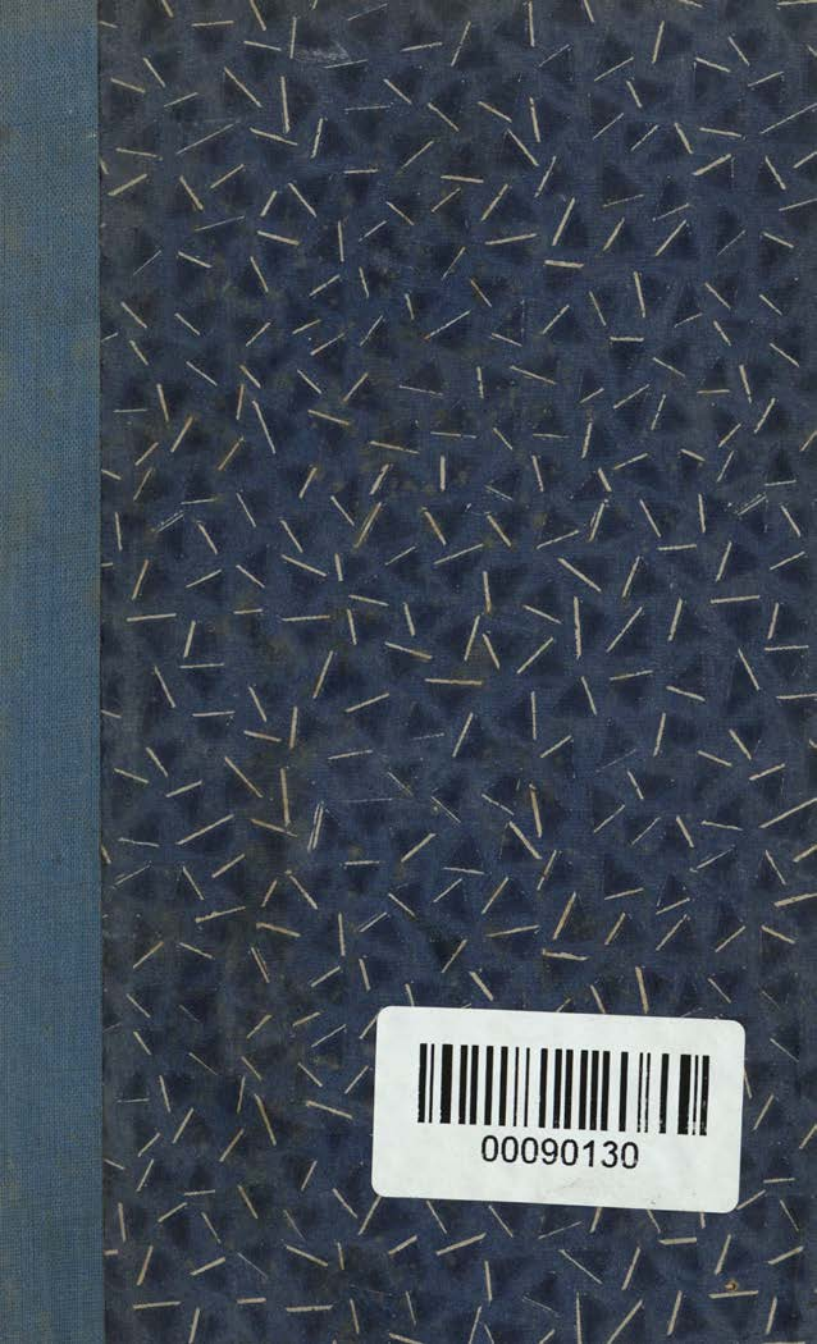
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SAM'S SWEETHEART

BY

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'COMIN' THRO' THE RYE,' 'CHERRY RIPE!'
'LAND O' THE LEAL,'

ETC., ETC.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SAM'S SWEETHEART.

Book III.

YUNTHA.

CHAPTER I.

'The good and virtuous man is not enslaved by passion, nor polluted by vice; for though he may be immersed in the waters of temptation, yet, like the lotus-leaf, he will rise uninjured by them.'—*Native Proverb.*

A YOUNG man was whistling, and washing his face in a lagoon full of crimson lotus flowers, and happening by chance to press one of their leaves below the water, was startled by seeing a face reflected in it as clearly and vividly as in a mirror, so that for

a second or two he appraised himself as a stranger, and uttered his opinion of himself aloud.

'What an unkempt wretch!' he said. 'No wonder she won't look at me; why, I might be mistaken for one of those brutes of æsthetics if I met anybody that I knew!'

He released the leaf with disgust, and continued his toilette with vigour, then betook himself to the shade of a tree, beneath which a fire smouldered, and the fish was in process of cooking that he had caught an hour ago in the lagoon.

He regarded his handiwork first with satisfaction, then with impatience, as the moments passed, but Yuntha did not appear.

It was the first breakfast he had ever prepared alone for her, promised overnight when as usual they had parted, and neither had known where the other slept, only that dawn was sure to bring them together with fresh morning faces, and eager looks, each with a story to tell of some false

alarm that had startled them during the dark hours, making them dread that they were overtaken.

But yesterday, for the first time, she had come to meet him, slowly and without joy—all day she had been pre-occupied and unlike herself, and though she had helped him snare their food, and cooked it as usual, she had hardly tasted it with him, and afterwards, instead of walking beside him, had flitted far ahead as his guide.

How had he offended her? had any chance word or look offered discourtesy to her maidenly pride?

They had been good comrades, and no more from the moment they had started—as a brother he had consoled her in her grief at parting with Billy, and honourably schooled his very eyes that they might not betray his heart to her, yet he had somehow frightened her; and if she did not come soon, he would think he had scared her from him altogether.

But even as he so thought, Yuntha had softly approached, and was standing behind him.

An indefinable change had passed over her during the past five days, and one that while it might escape the eye of a lover who had seen her but seldom, would at once be detected by any one of the tribe among whom she had lived. Had she seen it herself in her looking-glass—the river—and had her own image frightened her beyond any look or word of the Englishman, so that it was from fear of herself, not him, that she dreaded to go into his presence?

Suddenly he turned and saw her.

'Yuntha!' he cried, joyfully, and as their hands met, their faces reddened together, as though each mind had occasion for shame unknown to the other, and thought itself the most guilty.

'Look,' he said, reproachfully, as she turned to the fire, 'it has been ready half

an hour—the first breakfast I ever cooked all by myself!'

She laughed as she sat down on the grass, and he served her; but though she praised his cooking, she only played with what he had placed before her, and did not even notice that he himself ate nothing.

'What is the matter, Yuntha?' he said, at last, anxiously; 'are you angry with me, or are you worrying about Billy?'

She shook her head, but did not look up.

'Then what is there to worry about?' he said, looking puzzled. 'We are getting on famously — we've met nothing but friendly natives, and haven't had a single misfortune since we started; the weather's superb, and we've got plenty of food and water, and if we only get on as fast as during the last three days, we shall reach Bathurst in a little more than a week.'

'Yes,' said the girl, slowly, 'we have been very lucky; we have got so far without check, and without a single accident.

But now there's danger in the air—we are pursued, and ought to separate instantly, that each may afford the other a better chance of escape.'

'What have you heard or seen?' he said, uneasily, 'that makes you think this?'

'Last night,' she said, 'I woke with the conviction that something was near me, and then just as suddenly knew that it had gone, and I was once more alone. Just then the moon shone out, but though I listened intently, there was not so much as the crackling of a twig or rustle of a leaf; only across my throat lay something cold—it was a dart tipped with the Neil-yeri poison.'

'Good God!' cried the young man, starting up, 'did it scratch you?'

'No,' she said, 'or I should be in my death agonies now. Some friendly hand placed it there in warning, and then it struck me that you had got your warning

too, but differently. I sprang up and went to search for you, and only just in time, for a black shadow moved from your side as I approached, and your breast was bared as though for a blow about to be inflicted.'

'So you have saved my life for me again,' he said, in a voice so low and intense that she did not hear him. She was gazing out at the river, and for the first time it struck him how anxiety had told on, and even seemed to pale her—so greatly had the rich brownness of her beauty faded since the day he had seen her first.

'I watched by you till daybreak,' said the girl, 'for then you were safe. But now, would it not be wiser for us to separate, and dividing the weapons, go different ways, and so give our pursuers two trails to follow instead of one?'

'It would be wiser,' he said, and looked keenly at her, then rejoiced to see how pale she went, and kneeling down beside

her said, 'Have you saved me so often, only to abandon me at last, Yuntha?'

She gazed at him for a moment with the tearful eyes, the quivering lips of a perplexed child, and this unusual timidity in her drew him to her but the more closely, and made him long to soothe her womanish fears, and exercise on her behalf the strength he felt in every nerve and sinew of his body.

'The night has frightened you,' he said. 'Come,' he added, rising and holding out his hand, 'we will have a long and happy day together. We will fish, hunt, gather roots and flowers, and if there is to be an ambush, we will face it boldly, and side by side.'

'Yes,' she said, half aloud, 'we will stay together to-day—just one day.'

Her spirits rose as she spoke, she looked once more the audacious lovely young romp who had boxed his ears, and led him a dance up to death's very door; but even as

she took the hand he had stretched, both man and girl stopped short, and

'The *bag*,' he said, ruefully.

'The opossum skins!' she said, simultaneously.

'Confound them,' he said, heartily; 'I wonder how snails manage to support their existence? I'd rather be without a house and a wardrobe one always has to carry about on one's back.' But Yuntha had disappeared—soon returning with her opossum rug and the bag, which was heavy enough to weigh down one side of her shape, and bring the colour to her cheek.

He took it from her hand and looked at it with disgust.

'A nice thing to carry about with one on a holiday,' he said. 'Supposing we turn it out, and see if we can't lighten it?' and thereupon each took a corner and tumbled out all its contents on the grass—

Flat stones, earth, quartz, stones for hatchets, cakes of gum, kangaroo sinews to

sew with, needles made of kangaroo skin-bones, opossum hair, sharp shells with which to cut hair, native knives, native hatchets, pipe-clay, banksia cones for kindling fire, grease, red and yellow ochre, and lastly—two heavy bags of gold dust, secured in strong canvas and sealed at the mouth with red wax.

'We must take the gold,' said the Englishman; 'it's for your schooling.'

'My schooling?' repeated Yuntha, amazed. 'Who is going to school me here—in the Bush?'

But for his promise to Billy he declared to himself then, that he would have schooled her in love's lessons long ere this, and possibly regret for that promise depressed his voice and manner as he said,

'In England—not here.'

'Then you may throw those bags away with the other things,' she said proudly, 'for they will never be needed by me as long as I live.'

'Red ochre,' he said, taking it up and marking his hand; 'one might dye oneself into a red man with it in five minutes—have your people much knowledge of dyeing, Yuntha?'

The two were kneeling on either side of the curious heap; but as he spoke her eyes darkened, and went faltering down, resting with a kind of doubt and wonder on her beautiful limbs.

Suddenly she looked up, their eyes met, she saw the birth of discovery in his, and sprang to her feet panting as one who finds a secret snatched out of her keeping, almost before she had realised that it is her own.

He had started up too, and recognising the purely physical weakness or nervous fear that will sometimes unexpectedly betray a woman of the highest spirit, drew her unresistingly into his arms, muttering half savagely and inaudibly,—

'Even a brother, I suppose, may sup-

port his sister if she is in danger of falling?'

For a moment she rested in that strong support, and her woman's panic died away, then she lifted her head from his arm, and stood apart.

'You have been doing all the work,' said the young man, shaking his head, 'and I have had all the play, but to-day, Yuntha, I am going to work for you, and feed you, and you shall do nothing on earth but amuse yourself; so just you sit still while I sort out this bag.'

'Stop!' she cried, as she saw her needles energetically thrown on one side after other valuables. 'You are all in rags, and I was going to mend you to-day—don't you remember?'

'I'll mend myself,' he said, looking down rather ruefully at the tatters that hung round his ankles; then, as though struck by an inspiration, whipped out his penknife,

and began to cut his trousers off just below the knee.

'Now we're even,' he said, triumphantly. 'We've both got bare legs now, and if one gets scratched, so will the other.'

Yuntha laughed as the young man slung the two bags of gold-dust, one on either side of his body, and if she had ever heard of such a person as John Gilpin, would have thought of him then, but as it was, she gravely advised him to carry them on his back, and put on his opossum rug outside to make all safe.

'But the heat!' he said.

'I shall wear mine,' she replied, and suited the action to the word, so that the Englishman was constrained to follow her, though while she smiled into her sleeve, he inaudibly swore into his.

'I think we are ready now,' she said demurely; and he having gathered his weapons together, they set out side by side

on that uncertain track, that now led them to the river's edge, and anon plunged them into scrub that tempted them at every turn into the divergencies that meant death.

As the two young people gradually disappeared, their opossum rugs hiding all but a fair head and a brown, with two pairs of most beautiful bare legs that corresponded in colour to their crowns, a middle-aged aborigine cautiously stepped out from behind a tree, and gazed after them.

He was in no hurry—he could overtake them in a moment—even if they disappeared as though the earth had swallowed them, he could find them, and he paused to overturn the abandoned contents of the bag, puzzled and horrified at the indifference to the hallowed *lares* and *penates* of the native woman. Indolently he raised different articles from the ground with his toes for inspection, and having overhauled everything with an air of haughty indiffer-

ence, suddenly threw his hand up, and alert, noiseless, elastic, followed the young pair, his keen eye noting each leaf or fragment of stick turned by a footstep, each blade of grass that an animal had turned, the while he lent his senses to those aromatic scents with which in spring the bush abounds.

Now and again he directed a look of pity rather than of hatred towards the invisible figures that he followed—they were such poor game, and fell into the net so easily—to go holiday making instead of fighting, and forget the warning of the night in a fine morning stroll—it was like killing two babies in cold blood who had voluntarily walked into the executioner's arms. But a young shape, clad in green leaves, that slipped from behind a flowering oleander that he was passing, suddenly routed his complacency, and brought him to as sudden a halt as if he had been struck to stone.

'You are sent by the tribe?' she said, recognising him, and in his own tongue.

'To kill the Englishman, and take Yuntha back,' he said briefly.

'Does Djarrah know of this?' she said.

He looked at her in silence, as though he sought to pierce through a disguise, then his face lightened, and a crafty look gathered in his eyes.

'You would go back if Djarrah fetched you?' he said.

'Yes,' she said without hesitation; 'but first we must save him;' and she nodded towards the invisible Englishman.

'He must die,' said the man, curtly.

'Over my body,' she cried, and she had snatched his spear from his hand, and turned it against his breast before he dreamed of her intention.

'There are others behind,' he said, without a trace of fear; 'hearken. Will you swear that when Djarrah overtakes you,

you will compel him to bring you back to the camp?'

'He will not need persuasion,' she said, proudly; 'but I will swear it.'

'Then you may go forward without fear,' said the aborigine with dignity; but the girl stood motionless, her blue eyes fixed on his face.

'There is treachery here,' she thought, and in the same moment heard a step, and turned to see the Englishman behind her, tall and stately in his opossum rug, carrying his head aloft, and with his magnificent shoulders squared as one who marches to combat.

'This man has come to kill you,' she said in English, with head up, and muscles braced to steel; 'and afterwards Djarrah is to take me home. Look! is that he?' she cried, staring fixedly at an opening in the bush behind the aborigine.

He turned, and in the same moment she had pierced his skull with the spear,

and stretched him unconscious at her feet.

'Come,' she said to the Englishman, and seizing his hand, plunged instantly with him into the bush.

'Now you know why I told you to put on your opossum,' she said, as soon as she got breath. 'I heard a slight sound while we were sorting the bag, and expected a shower of spears after us when we started.'

'And what's the next step?' he said coolly.

'To climb a tree,' she said; 'that will break the trail, and confuse them——' and she had swarmed up a big trunk and reached a branch before he had realised that she had left him.

He followed her more slowly, and found her on the highest fork of the tree, so that when he had reached her, they looked down on an ocean of green that spread far as the eye could reach, save where the winding course of the river was sharply defined by a line of white mist that was

gently swayed into fantastic shapes by the morning breeze.

It seemed the first time he had been really alone with her since their flight; his sips of companionship with her had been so scanty and brief—she had kept him so hungry for a real look at her, that his heart leaped to think that there was only the sky above, their pursuers below, and no possibility of her escaping from him for an indefinite time.

CHAPTER II.

TWO ON A TREE-TOP.

But I wad gie my castles and towers,
Bowing down, bowing down;
I had that lady within my bowers,
And aye the birks a' bowing.

IN that wilderness of green where only tree-tops swayed, and sunshine and cloud shadows alone came to trouble them, the young man and girl sitting side by side in the fork of the tree, averted their eyes from one another, each secretly longing for the other to speak first.

The sense of imminent danger had drawn them closer; they were young, beautiful, together, and a hidden fear more exquisite than happiness thrilled both hearts, and held them mute, so that the birds flashed,

in and out of their retreat without fear, and a laughing jackass hard by found no human interruption to his harsh mirth.

Danger and probable death were below, but in this solitude above, were collected all the riches upon earth to the two who dwelt in it, and who, in each other's company, lacked nothing that life could afford.

Of course it was the woman who spoke first, and of the matter just then farthest from her thoughts.

'You will get no dinner to-day,' she said; 'but at sunset I will go down, and shall know at once if they have passed.'

'You should have given the fellow one of those bags of gold dust,' said the Englishman, answering her in the whisper she had used; 'perhaps he would have put the others off our track, and we could have pushed straight on to Bathurst.'

But Yuntha shook her head.

'Gold is valueless to a savage,' she said; 'it will buy him nothing that he cannot

obtain without it. But why should he have thought Djarrah was with us?' she added, with a puzzled look; 'though if he is at hand, and overtakes us, I must go back with him, for I have sworn it.'

'Then I shall go too,' said the Englishman.

Their eyes met. Swift as an electric shock the truth smote them, and showed each heart naked to the other's gaze, yet neither spoke nor stirred, and slowly the blood ebbed away from those two transfigured faces, leaving them pale and cold as death.

For the man's heart said, 'Too late!' and the girl's cried out, 'Too soon!' and between them lay a promise, and the fierce virginity of a soul that even in yielding chafed at its captivity.

'Hark!' she said, as the settler's clock rung out his sharp warning note overhead; 'the others will have breakfasted by now, and soon they will find their scout wounded, and then the chase will begin.'

Her voice did not tremble — her life seemed to be in her ears; she leaned forward, on the alert for the faintest sound that spoke of human approach.

He might look his fill at that half-averted face, and with arms sternly folded, and braced lips, he watched her.

She was pale, but her beauty had the glow of a sunset, the vigorous grace and freedom of a bird, beside those flavourless, cold-blooded women to whom he was accustomed, and to whom he must return if this wild creature guided him safely through the perils that surrounded them to Bathurst. He said to himself doggedly that he was in no hurry to reach that town — that to be lost in the bush with her, so long as food and water were procurable, was as nearly a state of Paradise as he could hope to attain; but if they were overtaken by Djarrah. . .

'Monana must have given him the Neil-yeri darts,' said the girl, as one who thinks

aloud; 'and Djarrah must have heard of it, and is trying to save us.'

'Yuntha,' said the Englishman, 'why did you come to my hut that night and tell me that I was not poisoned? Would it have concerned you if I had died?'

'My father was a white man,' she said, not looking round, 'and I was curious to see one of the race—and—and did not wish you to vanish before I had studied you.'

There was some of the old mischief in her voice, and he leaned forward to try and get a look at her eyes.

'And do you find a black or a white man the most interesting object of study?' he said quietly.

'The aborigine is noblest, but the white is at first more interesting because of his strangeness,' said the girl, with dimples at play in her cheek.

'And how is the aborigine superior to

the white man?' he said, in a tone of some dudgeon.

'He is a noble, generous child,' she cried, her eyes flashing. 'I admit he is badly trained, and has a child's faults; but if you treat him as one, he will love you, die for you, be faithful to you as one of those animals you despise, yet are so much more clever and reasonable than an ordinary human being!' She checked herself, for her voice had risen above the whisper in which she had previously spoken, and for a few minutes she listened keenly, then went on more quietly.

'Do you beat a little child,' said she, 'because he touches all that he sees, and takes of what he wants, when he grows hungry? He only follows his instincts—yet you white people would punish these poor creatures, who have never been taught—to whom everything is *free*—water, land, and sea—it is all his own—his birthright, but the white

men come and say, "No, it is ours," and they first rob, then kill us, and wherever the white foot is set, the black and the brown recedes, and the breath of civilization chokes and poisons us, for you bring us all your vices, and do not deign to teach us your virtues! And the fight is so unequal,' she went on with a sob in her voice, 'you are so strong—we are so weak—it is like beating a child that cannot stand up to you, that is so certain to come to you even though you may be wrong, not it, and tell you sobbing that it is sorry. . . If tears do not come into your eyes, and pain into your hearts when you realise that it is *you* who should be sorry, then you are not made of flesh and blood, but of stone!'

The Englishman sat rebuked: he had been so accustomed to regard these people as baboons to be mercilessly shot down, and in every way treated as dumb brutes without understanding, that he could not,

all in a moment recognise the black and the white streams of humanity as flowing from a common fount.

'And so you will marry Djarrah,' he said; 'this child of nature, who will love, beat, and perhaps spear you if he has cause for jealousy?'

A cold breath seemed to pass through her, and she knew that her woman's privilege of refusal had been forestalled as she said, without a moment's hesitation, 'Our life is a happy one. We move with the seasons, and everywhere find plenty and peace. We owe nothing, save to the God who made us, and scorn the gold dust for which the white man bows his head to the earth—toils, suffers, and dies without its having brought him a single possession worth the having.'

'And yet gold dust will buy love,' he said, as one in thought.

'White love, not black or brown,' she said swiftly, and though beside him was

as far away in her scorn as fifty trees distant, so that, flagging a little, he thought of his dinner, or the lack of it, and sighed.

Even love he thought grew differently in this country to in any other—here where swans were black, and ravens white, where the south means cold, and the north heat, and the devil is pictured as the colour of snow.

'We do not sell ourselves for gold, or work beneath the lash for the sake of wages and call it honour,' she went on with a fine air of pity; 'but then you have been brought up so, poor things, and of course you do not know any better!'

'We are not so bad as you think,' he said; 'but you will find all that out when you come to England.'

'I thought you said I was to marry Djarrah,' she said, half looking round, 'and now you say that I am going to England?'

'So you are,' he said, resolutely, 'or I will stay,' he added, so low that she could not hear him.

'Hush,' she exclaimed, suddenly, 'they are coming;' but though the Englishman heard no sound, her varying features were painted by each impulse of fear and alarm as it arose, till in a breath her blue eyes became fixed, her slight shape reared itself, and in a whisper she said to the young man, '*Some one is climbing the tree,*' then seized his opossum rug, and drew it over his head and body, and covering herself in the same way, crouched down close to the fork of the bough, and waited.

CHAPTER III.

When the sun gaed down, and the mirk nicht cam,
O! tearfu' were her e'en!
O, I fear, I fear, it was na for nocht,
My dreams were sae dowie yestreen!

WHEN Yuntha and Guy had rushed through the forest hand in hand, two young runaways, whose speed was only to be accounted for by a possible Nemesis at their heels, they had burst upon the vision of a man who was himself a fugitive, and knew that he, too, had pursuers on his track.

He stood motionless as they flashed past without a suspicion of his presence, then glided after them, his sinewy hands clenched, a storm of passion flooding his heart and sweeping across his features,

while his breast laboured and heaved with the emotion against which he struggled in vain.

He followed them until they reached the tree, beneath whose leaves they quickly disappeared, and himself stood at its foot, looking upwards with burning jealousy in his eyes, and a desperate impulse that nearly overmastered him to ascend. Mental suffering had told heavily upon, but could not destroy the lines of, a physique that was yet magnificently beautiful—for the man was Djarrah.

Up there, alone as in the midst of a desert, his false love and her English lover were face to face, hand to hand, heart to heart, and the echo of pursuit would sound cold in the ears of those who snatched those moments of joy that the man below would willingly have paid for with his life-blood.

As he leaned sick and giddy with inanition, love and jealousy, against the

tree, straining his ears for the sound of voices above, suddenly the instinct of the savage asserted itself, and he threw back his head and listened.

His trained senses gave no warning of danger, but he knew that the double trail from the point where he had followed the flying pair would concentrate the whole pursuing party on the spot where he now stood.

Those two overhead must be mad, he said to himself; they would be caught as easily as a spear thrusts out a kangaroo rat or an opossum, from a hollow tree; and why should he try to save those who would not attempt to save themselves? Life was valueless to him; he would climb the tree, show himself to them, hear her voice once more, and die in her company; but even as he turned to ascend the tree, the savage's haughty pride asserted itself, and forbade him to do aught save make an effort to save them.

And yet she had no thought of him . . . she had looked happy, lovely, as she flew past him, her world filled with but one figure—the Englishman's.

He knew that time was short, yet long enough to enable him to make one of those baffling and misleading trails in which the savage is so profoundly skilled, and that would carry the pursuers past the tree, while he, doubling like a hare on his track, would warn the lovers to escape before the *ruse* was discovered and the savages were upon them. But he had scarcely returned and taken up his station in a gum-tree not ten yards distant from the one that held the pair, when his fine ear detected the faint sounds of approach, and the next moment, almost as noiselessly as shadows stole into sight half a dozen aborigines headed by the scout, whose bleeding head testified to the vigour of Yuntha's thrust. Djarrah's eyes flashed, for he saw that only a few of the party sent to capture him were

below, and that having divided their company, no means of communicating with each other had occurred up to that moment.

They paused below, then began a minute and searching examination that was gradually leading them away, when high up, as in the very clouds itself, sounded the clear, pure notes of a girl's voice.

Djarrah's heart went cold, and his hand tightened on his spear as they turned with the swiftness of lightning, and came back uncertain as to the tree in which Yuntha was hidden, but convinced that Djarrah was with her, and so the object of their chase overtaken. He knew that they wanted himself, that had the girl and the Englishman taken a contrary direction to his track they might have reached their destination unmolested, so profound was the tribe's scorn for the frailty of a woman whom they had never recognised as one of themselves, or forgiven for the accident

of having a white father. His mind was made up when a naked foot pressed the bark in the opposite tree, and without a sound he swung himself down into the midst of the men, and with his arms held behind his back, confronted them.

The man who had begun to climb stopped half-way up the trunk, then descended: he had chosen the wrong tree, and would have to ascend the other when Djarrah was disposed of.

The young man stood facing his foes with the coolness that is rather indifference than pluck, for of his own life he thought not a jot, but only of that girlish one up yonder that might be saved by the sacrifice of his own.

They drew round him cautiously, and looked right and left as fearing an ambush; then the oldest of the men spoke, and commanded him to lay down his arms, and submit to be taken back as a prisoner to the camp.

'I am ready to return with you,' said Djarrah, haughtily, and flinging down his weapons, moved as if to depart, but though they instantly closed around him, weapon in hand, ready to launch at the first sign of flight, not one out of the six durst seek to bind or secure his limbs.

As he stepped forward with his usual fearless, graceful step, they involuntarily moved with him, then stopped suddenly, remembering what, in the excitement of his unexpected appearance they had forgotten, the pair in hiding in the tree.

But the Englishman could fight, so could the girl, like a wild cat, as they knew; and how were six men to conduct three such prisoners through the bush?

They hesitated, and looking back were, for a moment, off guard. That moment was Djarrah's, and with a shrill warning note that went up straight as a clarion cry to the ears for which it was intended, he leaped from out of the midst of his

enemies, and drawing them after him as the quarry lures the sleuth hounds, had disappeared with them from sight while yet his voice seemed to ring out on the clear morning air.

That cry pierced to ears dulled by the opossum skins beneath which two young bodies crouched, a little chilled with thoughts of the death that seemed so near, but dazzled by an insight into their own hearts that in this moment of supreme danger drew their hands together, and made them face their fate as with but one soul between them.

When the faint vibration of those climbing footsteps had ceased, the man drew breath, only the girl's hand went colder, for she knew that danger was but delayed, not past; but when the shrill warning note reached her, she thrust aside the rugs, and with a cry of '*Djarrah!*' began to descend. But when she reached the ground, and saw the trodden-down grass and the weapons

that she knew to be his, Yuntha knew what had happened, and that in distracting the chase from her, he had sacrificed himself. Kneeling down, she passionately kissed first one, then another of the arms that he had thrown away for her sake, thinking how no other man was likely to love her so faithfully, or so well. But looking up, and seeing the Englishman by her side, she rose, and less as one who takes her treasure in her hand, than as she who leaves it with tears behind her, passed with him on their flight into the forest.

CHAPTER IV.

Beautiful was the night
Behind the black wall of the forest.

In a long and narrow valley, bounded by rugged precipices on either side, and with only a few larger trees to break copses of brushwood that resembled thickets of hazel, Yuntha and Guy lay side by side, and sound asleep.

The night had been dark as pitch, but now the moon was up, and flooded them with her light as they lay each with head inclined to the other, and their opossum rugs around them, both so young, so beautiful, that the gazer's heart might have ached to see them so alone, so entirely at

the mercy of the hearts that had long ago turned traitors against them.

The man who gazed might have been but one of those darksome and weird shadows that lay out of the track of the moonbeams, till he stepped out of the grand solitude, the majestic hush of the night, and, coming close to their very feet, gazed down on the pair.

Overhead murmured the sighing sound that the casuarina gives out unceasingly, and that had soothed one of the sleepers below to rest—but no peace breathed itself into the soul of the man who stood trembling, and looking down upon them.

Love had tamed his savage spirit, and the girl's happiness and honour were now his only care in life, but in this moment the fierce blood leaped up, and he told himself that better had he left her to her fate that morning, than have looked upon her as he now looked to-night.

Yet the eye that could so unerringly

read the heavens, the streams, the woods, found in those two unconscious faces an innocency that his thoughts hung back from, and dared not outrage — in their beauty, their helplessness, they were less like two erring souls than children, who being overtaken by slumber, had lain down side by side, secure in each other's guardianship against danger. Yet here was peril—the very purity, trust, and naturalness of the love that these two creatures plainly bore each other, might betray them into dishonour, and Djarrah cowered and shrunk away, as the girl waking, stretched out her arms, and touching the Englishman, recoiled and sat erect.

The moonlight dazzled her eyes, the black shadows scared her . . . falteringly and fearfully she turned slowly, and gazed at the man by her side, then seeing how sound he slept with one arm thrown above his head, stole away from him, and came back trembling with hands clasped above

her heart, and more love in her eyes than his waking ones had ever seen.

Less as a woman bound to the man she loves by an indissoluble tie, than as the maiden who with yearning gaze takes her last farewell of what she renounces, Yuntha looked down upon the Englishman, and even while Djarrah's hope of her love died out for ever, with a bound of the heart he realised that she was pure and innocent of harm as on the day she had sped him on his day's work, and he had returned to find her fled.

In this poor savage's heart the very purest essence of love dwelt, for he placed the value of her happiness incalculably above his own; and even as she drew in a sobbing breath of renunciation, Djarrah swore to himself that she should be secured against loss, though his own and Guy's souls paid the forfeit.

The Englishman slept on. No sixth sense was awake to tell him how in the

darkness, and after long watching for fear of an ambush, she had unconsciously laid down beside him, and slept soundly till the moonlight roused her, and she had looked around. As she turned to leave him, a shadow seemed to detach itself from a tree, and Djarrah stood before her.

She uttered a low cry of joy, and sprang to him, but with no kiss, no cousinly clasp about his neck . . . such reticence does love teach, and a woman masters her lesson on the instant, and never forgets it.

As their hands and eyes met, the havoc wrought by suffering in him struck her less keenly, than did the changes in herself strike him. Was it the moonlight that made her so pale, or was she bewitched into one of those white women that he had heard of as so beautiful, but never seen?

Before either could speak—before their hands might fall apart—out of the darkness whistled a spear that passed between them, and fell at the distance of a few paces.

The whistling sound, or the presence of danger, roused the Englishman, who sprang up broad awake, and disappeared with Yuntha and Djarrah into a thicket not far from whence the attack seemed to come.

Their retreat might be already filled with enemies, so dense was its blackness; but they boldly entered it, watching across the space of moonlight for the attacking party, who seemed to hesitate, and be in no hurry to appear.

The faint, continuous murmur of their voices reached the three as they retreated noiselessly beneath the stunted banksias and mimosas, which shut out all save here and there a stray moonbeam that revealed them, silent, yet knit together, not by the fierce instinct of self-preservation, but by their fear for one another.

To steal from thicket to thicket — to escape from the long narrow valley that had formed a *cul-de-sac* to which their pursuers had patiently tracked them, and

thence escape to the open bush—this was their task, but one that required strength, skill, and courage in the execution. Suddenly Djarrah commanded his companions to kneel down in their tracks, and so, in the utter solitude and silence of the midnight hour, awaited the appearance of their pursuers. Gradually the light tread, the hushed voices of the advancing savages, made themselves faintly audible to the ears pressed against the earth; and a curious thrill passed through the Englishman as he realised that his companions and he were in the very midst of a scattered party, any one of which might at any moment happen upon them. All around them those ghostly steps, those threatening shapes, seemed to multiply, till the warm night air was full of them, and a sudden touch on his arm nearly brought an exclamation to his lips, so sure was he that they were discovered. But the touch was Yuntha's—and he rose as noiselessly as

herself; and after an interval of listening, in which no sound reached them, followed Djarrah, who led them without hesitation, bringing them out in a part of the valley that they had not hitherto traversed.

Before they left the shadow of the trees, Djarrah lifted his hand and pointed to a brilliant star that seemed to stand as sentinel above the outlet from the valley beyond, and, bidding Yuntha march with eyes stedfastly fixed upon it, signed to them to go forward; and himself followed.

But from afar off that grand and lofty figure showed clear in the moonlight between the young flying pair and their pursuers, and those before did not notice in the fierce shouts that pursued them, how gradually Djarrah's steps ceased to closely follow theirs, till as the girl and man disappeared into the bush, he stopped short altogether, and with his back to a tree turned to face the foes so nearly upon him.

CHAPTER V.

Ay call him, call him over the lea,
Alack, and well a-day!
Lover will never come back to thee
Who loves and gallops away.

FOUR days had elapsed since Djarrah and Yuntha had met and parted so quickly, when, within sight of Bathurst, two fugitives paused to look at one another, then, as with but one impulse between them, turned back to the shelter they had just left, ashamed as Adam and Eve when alone in the Garden of Eden.

The man was in rags, unkempt and sunburnt to the hue of an aborigine—the girl was in tattered green leaves, and with feet blistered and torn; but both were so beautiful, and so happy, that even their rueful

looks, as they gazed at one another, showed more content than the laughter of ordinary mortals.

'We shall be locked up as vagrants,' said the man; 'but they will separate us —could we not say we are brother and sister, or—married?'

Perhaps the girl found the fine clear morning chilly, for she shivered slightly, and drew her shabby opossum rug closer about her.

Dew glittered on the leaves, parrots were waking up and seeking honey from the flowering trees; a kangaroo hard by was hopping away to his lair, having filled his pouch since dawn; behind the wanderers lay the hilly country with its myriad streams that they had crossed with so much difficulty, while before them lay the city that only by a succession of miracles they had been permitted to reach.

'You will go to the city alone,' said the girl; and all the sunshine of the morning

seemed to the Englishman to die out as she spoke. 'Soon there will be a ship, you will sail away in it, and I shall go back to Djarrah.'

Simple, grand, unconscious of bravery, the image of Yuntha's lover rose before the eyes of the Englishman, and for the first time it crossed his mind that such a man might well be the successful rival of himself.

'You will marry him?' he said, coldly.

'No.'

'Thank God!' he cried, passionately, and no more selfish a rejoicing was ever uttered by a man's lips for a woman's loss. They had been together twelve days, yet not a word of love had passed between them, and the man had resolutely put away from him all thought of the moment in which they must part; but now that it was here—that this episode in his life was about to close for ever—suddenly it came home to him that he was leaving his life

itself behind him, and he knew that he loved Yuntha with every fibre of his soul.

He loved her, and he must leave her—he might not even dare to fulfil Billy's trust and take her to England, for if she were in the same country as himself, he could not keep space between them.

He felt like a man who, sailing away on a summer cruise, finds himself committed to a perilous voyage whose issues are life or death, and with the dread that even a brave man may know who sees more than his life involved, Guy turned to look at the girl who sat beside him.

Pale and lovely, with those tatters and scratches that spoke eloquently enough to her concern for himself, she, nevertheless, did not seem to be thinking of him or his departure, but rather of the lover she had left in such peril, and to whom she was eager to return. And yet she would not marry Djarrah, the Englishman thought, exultantly; and on opposite sides of the

world they would be near to each other, as in those days of unbroken companionship, when they might have been the first man and woman created, had they only dared to love and speak, instead of to love and keep silence.

'Yuntha,' he said, and at his voice she started, and rose to her feet.

'Good-bye,' she said, and held out the slender hand that had served him so well; but he did not take it, and as their eyes met, the dauntless spirit seemed to pass from hers to his, leaving him her master.

In that moment he knew that he would have defied the traditions of his house and ignored his future, but that betwixt him and her stood a barrier that he dared not leap—the barrier of dishonour.

'Yuntha,' he said, almost harshly, 'do you love me?'

'Yes,' she said, coldly and proudly.

'And yet you will not go with me to England?'

'No.'

'Nor let me return with you to Billy?'

'No.'

'Then we will stay here together,' he said; and there was that in his voice which made her heart quake, while outwardly she stood unmoved.

'You will go away,' she said, gently, 'and you will never come back. But we have been happy — and we have loved one another,' she added, as proudly as another woman might have spoken with shame.

'Is it all past, then?' he said, jealously. 'Is there no future to our love? is there no present?'

She turned a shade paler and colder, but early in the day she had mastered her lesson of how in loving, he had renounced her, and with the savage's power of silently enduring pain had long ago nerved herself to the parting that was so near at hand.

'You have faithfully fulfilled your trust

to Billy, and you will not undo it all now,' she said, with a mournful ring in her voice that pierced his heart—so different was it to the clear, joyous accents that had mocked his ears once as with a nightingale's song; 'and you will bid me good-bye, and go upon your way.'

'But Billy bade me take you to England,' he cried swiftly.

'And if you took me there,' she said, slowly, 'would you take me to your own people, would you be ashamed of me?'

'Ashamed?' he said, and came close with such passion in his eyes as kindled none in hers, rather the lines about her exquisite mouth grew stern as though sober earnest, and not fooling, were in her mind.

'You would own me among your friends,' she said, 'be seen with me in your street, and never once blush for me because my colour was different to your own?'

If she faltered as she spoke these latter

words, it was for reasons of which she knew nothing, but he thought she wavered, and snatching her cold hands, pressed them to his breast.

Somehow she realised then that if she went with him, it meant dishonour to her; if he remained, dishonour to himself.

'Let me stay,' he said, hoarsely; 'they think me dead. Let them think so always.'

'Do you mean your parents?' she said; 'or—or is there any other woman?'

Her voice died to a whisper, but he heard, and with bold eyes faced her, crying, 'And if there were—what then? You have loved Djarrah.'

'And she loves you?' said Yuntha, quietly. 'She is expecting you back?'

'She is probably flirting,' he said, 'and has forgotten that I exist. And when my reported death causes her to recollect me, she will marry some one else who will put me out of her head in two days.'

'And you loved her?' said Yuntha.

'Did you love Djarrah?' he asked as quickly.

'Describe her to me,' said the girl, sitting down again on the grass, and turning her head aside so that he might not see her face.

'I can't,' he cried, abruptly; 'but I've got a picture of her, somewhere — a wretched daub — but like her.'

'Give it to me,' she said, and held out her hand.

He drew it from his tattered clothing, and she took the locket without a tremor, and bade him leave her alone for a little while.

But when, after a few minutes of absence, he returned, the locket lay glittering in the sunshine, and Yuntha was gone.

Book IV.

LÆTITIA.

CHAPTER I.

As lang's this ring it keeps the hue
Ye'll know I am a lover true;
But when the ring turns pale and wan
Ye'll know I love another man.—*Hynde Horn.*

'TISHY!'

No reply.

'Lætitia!'

'Well?'

'Do you think he means to come back?'

'If he is dead, he probably does not mean anything; if he is alive, he will be here for his wedding-day.'

'I had begun to think it was you who

would be late for that ceremony,' said the first speaker, drily; 'but who knows that, like Hynde Horn's, his ring has not changed colour—has yours?' she added, significantly.

'His ring may change colour, but his honour won't,' said the second speaker. 'Only do you know, Cynthia, I am inclined to think that he is dead.'

'And how do you feel at the prospect of being plain Miss Tishy for the rest of your days, instead of Countess Lætitia? Tishy Trefusis — Tishy Sands—I declare one is as bad as the other!'

'Bobby never called me Tishy in his life,' cried the beauty of the family, jumping up and stamping her foot on the shabby carpet; 'can't you call me Lettice or Letty — anything but that hateful, vulgar, odious *Tishy?*'

'He always calls you Letty,' said Cynthia, threading a needle calmly. 'You don't want us to appropriate his pet names,

do you? Tishy you are, and Tishy you will always remain. Why, even Guy never called you anything else.'

'He had no manners,' said Lætitia, loftily; 'and, of course, he picked up that name from you and the boys. . . . . Just fancy a man saying, "Tishy, I love you!" instead of "I love you, Letty;" . . . . it set my teeth more on edge than the raspberries we were eating. . . . . Perhaps if he had called me Lætitia, I might have loved him.'

'Unless Bobbie had called you Letty first,' said her sister in a matter-of-fact tone.

'Poor Bobbie!' said the younger girl, looking round the shabby room that spoke so eloquently of the many cares of a large family, and its few luxuries; 'if only he were heir-presumptive instead of Guy!'

'Very much presumptive,' said her sister, drily. 'Who is to know that John

Trefusis may not walk in one of these days with an heir who's got no presumption about him at all?'

'He has not been heard of for twenty years,' said Tishy, tranquilly; 'and he hated women. If he had died and left a son, we should have seen something of him long before this.'

'Supposing it were a she?' said Cynthia; 'the title and estates descend in the female as well as the male line.'

'How I should hate her if she suddenly appeared on the scene!' said Tishy, with surprising energy, as she took up a sock, and, as though from mere force of habit, began to darn it.

'You would marry Bobbie and be perfectly happy,' said her sister.

'Bobbie is not a spaniel,' said the younger girl, 'though he has the faithfulness of one. Perhaps he has fallen in love with somebody else by now.'

'He looks like it,' said Cynthia, 'and

as though his bliss were rather too much for him. The very curl has gone out of his moustache, the colour out of his eyes, his hair is half an inch too long, and yesterday I saw him standing in a puddle with his necktie under one ear, and his eyes fixed on a new moon.'

'He is at home!' cried Tishy, eagerly, 'and you never told me! Poor dear fellow!' she added, tenderly, as she wiped a tear away with a sock; 'and he always dressed so much better than Guy, too. Somehow one always expected to see Guy hurl all his clothes away as so much useless *impedimenta:* he must have found it quite a relief to live among the savages as the savages do.'

'I don't wonder the life attracted him,' said Cynthia, laying down her work, and looking dreamily across the parsonage garden to the drear November sky beyond; 'think of the freedom, the absence of worry, collars, bills, rates and taxes, of

never having to order your dinner, but only to catch and cook it, and then to eat it when you are famished—delicious!'

'I suppose our cousin, John Trefusis, liked it, or he wouldn't have thrown up everything that most men value to be able to enjoy it,' said Tishy; 'but, for my part, I hate being hungry, and never could cook decently.'

'It seems to be in the Trefusis' blood, that wandering, restless instinct,' went on Cynthia, with a flush on the thin, sallow face, that was so unlike her sister's; 'but only the men are able to indulge it, not the women.'

'Would you like to go too?' said Tishy, looking at the girl in wonder. 'What a pity Guy didn't fall in love with you, and that Bobbie is not heir to a peerage!'

'*Did* Guy ever fall in love with you, Tishy?' said Cynthia.

'Well,' said Tishy, who was never more herself than when alone with her only

sister, 'it was just this way: you know how impossible it is to walk in lanes and get over stiles by yourself—particularly in spring—one can't take any pleasure in a lane unless one has somebody waiting round the corner to help one over bogs—and Bobbie was away with his regiment, and you see I had got *used* not to take my walks abroad alone.'

'Precisely,' said Cynthia, drily.

'Of course,' said Tishy, as she attacked a fresh sock, 'one never thinks of such things in town, nor do the men either. I suppose our complexions get so bad, or the newspapers put us out of their heads; but in the country a lover is a part of the landscape, and if he is not there, it's like a sunset without a sun, and one longs to box somebody's ears.'

'The boys', for instance,' said Cynthia.

'And so,' resumed Tishy, 'when Guy came, of course we went out walking, but it was all so respectable . . . . if only he

would have let me start before or after him —but together! It took all the green out of the lanes, the little white clouds out of the sky, and even made his hat the wrong shape, and his clothes a size too big for him!'

'And how did it all happen at last?' said Cynthia, with some curiosity, as her own needle ceased, and she looked at her sister's briskly moving one.

'He had been lecturing me,' said Tishy, calmly, 'and we were eating raspberries. I wonder when a man will understand that if a woman takes a scolding meekly, it is because she has a contempt for his logic, not because he has convinced her? And pure gratified vanity made him offer his heart with the last raspberry. They were late in their season, and a little sour, but I accepted both.'

'Poor Bobbie!' said Cynthia, and sighed.

'Bobbie knew I had to do my duty to my family,' said her sister, putting on a

Lætitia air;' 'and if I can sacrifice myself for the common good, pray why cannot Bobbie?'

'Poor soul!' said Cynthia, smitten with a sudden compunction; 'and are you spoiling your own, and Bobbie's lives for us? Besides, Guy will find you out, if he has not done so already.'

'He has,' said Tishy placidly; 'and it's an awful thing for a man to look through your face, as if it were a sheet of plate-glass, trying to find a soul beyond—especially when you know you haven't got one.'

'Dreadful!' said Cynthia, earnestly; but on Guy's account, not Tishy's.

'And one hates to be sent to school when one is grown up,' went on her sister. 'When a lover turns schoolmaster, one may view him with fear, and perhaps respect—but there's very little love in the business.'

'I never heard Guy scold anybody,' said Cynthia, dubiously; 'he was too much of a man—too big and strong.'

'Perhaps he found that raspberry as sour as I did,' said Tishy, candidly; 'or he was used to a different sort of a woman . . . . and I was used to Bobbie . . . . and it's so much pleasanter to be adored than lectured.'

'I've never tried either the one or the other,' said Cynthia; 'but if I had to choose between looking up to a lover, or looking down to him, I should choose the former.'

'Oh! looking down is far more comfortable,' said Tishy; 'looking up gives you a crick in your neck, and that makes you angry with the person you are staring at. Bobbie can't argue, I know, but when he tells me I am the loveliest woman in the world, he *means* it,—and of course I like to believe him.'

'Of course,' said Cynthia, looking with genuine pride at her sister; 'and I believe it, too.'

'Now, Guy never admired me,' said Tishy, impartially. 'I am not his style;

or rather I am too much a Trefusis, and too like himself, for him to care to see his female double sit down opposite to him for the rest of his days. Do you remember that picture in the *Illustrated London News:* "I'm going a-milking, sir, she said?" Well, he came out very early one morning, and caught me as I was going over the meadow to milk Brindle, and he declared that I was that girl's image, though her hair was so much darker than mine, and the very day before, he had said she was too coarse, too rusticated to please his taste!'

'Yet a man can't make a handsomer offer than to live with a woman for the whole of her life,' said Cynthia, stoutly.

'Yes,' said Tishy, sighing. 'I am afraid he will have to put up with me for good and all, if he is back by the first of January.'

'Then you mean to marry him?' said Cynthia.

Tishy opened her splendid eyes full on her sister, much as though she had exploded like a bomb, or suddenly gone mad.

'I never promised Bobbie anything,' she said, 'never, however hard he begged; and I promised Guy.'

'And if Guy does not come back?'

'There is always Bobbie; and there are other people,' said Tishy, as the door burst open, and three young boys rushed in, satchels on back, and bursting with health and spirits.

'I say, Cinders!' they all shouted out together, and rushing at their elder sister, 'what do you think? Father's got a letter, and poor Tishy's beau's been eaten up by cannibals, and she'll marry Bobbie yet!'

Twilight had come on. In the gloom they could not see Lætitia in her dark dress in the corner.

'Hush!' said Cynthia; and put the boys back, and went to her sister, who stood

quite still, with thoughts that wavered between her living and dead lovers.

'Poor Tishy!' said the eldest brother, when he knew that she was there; and somehow a pang went through her heart. . . . was she never to be Lætitia, not even in her misfortunes?

'Bobbie's the best of the two,' said Tom, her second brother, patting her heavily on the back; 'besides, if you don't fancy *him*, there's lots more, and as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it!'

'I should think so,' said a third voice contemptuously. 'Why, she got a new beau only yesterday in church. I heard him tell our head-master to-day she was a regular beauty. And what do you think? He had got her name quite pat, for he called her a *Tishy!*'

'Rubbish!' struck in a fourth voice; 'he said nothing of the sort. He said she was a perfect *Tishuns*—plural.'

'She *can't* be plural,' said the eldest

brother; 'and for my part I call it confounded cheek calling our sister by her Christian name.'

'There, go along with you,' cried Cynthia, hustling the boys out of the room, but not before a fifth indignant voice was heard to exclaim,—

'He meant nothing of the sort, and no impudence at all. He said she was just a real *Titian*, and pray how was *he* to know that her name was *Tishy?*'

CHAPTER II.

And wow! but they were lovers dear,
And loved full constantlie;
But ay the mair when they fell out,
The sairer was their plea.

'My dears,' said a kind, anxious voice from the doorway a few minutes later, 'are you sitting there all alone in the dark?'

'Yes, father,' said Cynthia, going up to him, and taking his hand to lead him to where Tishy sat. 'The boys have told us,' she added in a low tone.

'Poor little maid!' said Mr. Trefusis, as he sat down and stroked the hair of his youngest daughter, and she blessed him in her heart that he had not called her Tishy.

'There's some hope yet,' he said, with a cheerfulness in his voice that all three

knew to be assumed; 'there's a chance that he has fallen into the hands of friendly blacks, or met with some English party. Carruthers says that Guy followed a kangaroo that had got separated from the herd they were chasing, and was out of sight immediately. After a long search, his horse was found on the brink of a precipice impossible of descent, and Carruthers and the guides seem to have jumped to the conclusion (premature, as I think) that in his headlong pursuit of the kangaroo he was hurled over the precipice, though the horse managed to save himself.'

'I don't believe he is dead at all,' said Cynthia, briskly. 'Cheer up, Tishy, he'll be back in time for his wedding-day yet.'

But Tishy's hand, enclosed in her father's, only went a little colder. She was partly stunned, and did not know yet whether she were more sorry or more glad —more glad for his death, more sorry for the held-out hope of his return; and she

wished that Bobbie were somewhere near, and wondered if he were taking his long leave, or had only come home for a few days.

If the poor father's thought glanced with regret across his narrow means, his five boys to educate and place out in the world, his portionless daughters, and the unexceptionable son-in-law Guy had bid fair to be, he quickly checked the sigh that arose, and shortly left the girls to themselves, infinitely relieved at the way his daughter had taken the news.

'Tishy,' said the elder girl as the door closed on their father, 'do you mind—much?'

Tishy put her head down on her sister's shoulder, and thought long before she replied. She had been born a beauty in a family rather remarkable for its good looks, and her greatness had been, so to speak, thrust upon her at an early age, so that she had grown up feeling that she must do

something to deserve her position, and not very certain as to how she was to do it.

She was exactly like the rest, save for her superior looks—a hearty, handsome, healthy creature, of that robust, vigorous order of beauty that men so profoundly admire, and her instincts were in keeping with the scrambling family that she sincerely loved, and was one of in heart and soul.

Tishy she was, with a Tishy's tastes, and not half sure that she would be happy as anything else, but it was in one of those spasmodic phases in which she struggled to be Lætitia, that she had met Guy, and promptly sacrificed herself to what she considered her duty to her family.

'I hope he is not dead,' she said at last to her sister; 'but if he never came back I should not be . . . sorry.'

'Oh!' said Cynthia, shocked; for she did not know the hardness of a pre-occupied heart, or the faithfulness of Tishy's,

so that having once locked it on Bobbie's image, she had never opened it again for Guy.

'So I am to be Tishy, plain Tishy, always,' said the younger girl presently. 'Poor fellow, if he'd really loved me, I could cry for him . . . but as it is, I almost feel inclined to cry a little for myself.'

'Do,' said Cynthia, heartily; 'it will do you good—and I will light the fire; it went out while we were mending.'

But Tishy did not cry. When the fire at last blazed up, it showed her dry-eyed and beautiful in her linsey gown, the only lovely thing in that unlovely, motherless room, that spoke so plainly and pitifully to the long, long absence of the mistress of the house.

The girl looked around with a little shiver. Somehow it seemed more sordid than ever, and in the air beyond, she saw those stately halls that, as Guy's wife, she would have owned, and in which she would

have been Countess Lætitia . . . . and then the castle shaped itself into Bobbie's features, and she started up, with her blue eyes more eager than they had been for many a long day.

'I cannot breathe here,' she said; and snatched up a coarse grey cloak and hood that lay near, and huddled them on.

'I couldn't go on mending stockings just now,' she said rather wistfully, as Cynthia drew her hood close; 'if you want me, I shall only be prowling about close to the house.'

The cold raw air rushed up to meet the two girls as they opened the hall door, but it was on Cynthia's heart that it struck, as going softly back to the empty parlour she laid her head down on the table, and wept aloud for Guy.

CHAPTER III.

Oh, sweet Marjorie! oh, dear Marjorie
For faith and charitie,
Will ye gie to me the faith and troth
That I gied once to thee?

TISHY'S feet carried her, without reference to her will, through the wicket-gate of the parsonage gardens, and into the spinny adjoining, not pausing till she came to a felled tree, on which she sat down automatically as though she were used to it.

The night was black as pitch, without the glimmer of a star overhead; but neither the darkness nor the cold oppressed her, for the girl had come out to unriddle that most vexatious question—her own heart.

Was she sorry, or was she glad, that her

dream of greatness was over, and herself left to those primitive, homely joys that she knew and loved?

Grandeur was purely an abstract idea with her—she had never tasted it, and did not understand what it meant—and if she had all the undeveloped instincts of a fine lady, she did not know it, and was in some hope of going through life without discovering them.

She did not guess how heavy a make-weight Guy could have given her to balance Bobbie's heart; and now that Guy was dead, she could find neither a tear for him, nor her lost great ladyship, never having owned either, or tested their value.

Next to her family, or perhaps before it, the one tender spot in her heart was for the lover who had adored her as plain Miss Tishy, but called her Letty. No doubt he despised her now; and at the thought of how she had slighted his tried love, for the sake of calling herself Lætitia, the girl

dropped her head on her hands, and sobbed aloud.

She thought she must have been mad to thrust aside Bobbie's true and faithful love for this mere chance that had failed her. But she had fancied herself the one who was to restore her family to its ancient grandeur, and, lo! while she was playing at pitch-and-toss with Bobbie's heart (to the neglect of her own) Guy had appeared with his romantic expectations—a pilgrim in grey, who might at any moment doff his sober mantle, and shine out as the young prince who was to place her at the head of her kingdom.

And now he lay dead in his cloak of grey, and all her dreams had died down to the probable loss of Bobbie's love.

She was only a country girl, born and bred on the verge of a Devonshire moor, and with no great house at which to visit and educate herself, and who could not afford to read the novels that travestied a

world she did not know, so that she could not realise all that she had missed by losing Guy; and if an embryo Lady Teazle did not know it, as she sobbed beneath the wintry trees, and like the dog in the fable saw substance and shadow disappearing together beneath the waves. She was too hearty and true to her home instincts (in spite of her Lætitia airs) to wish to leave her people at the first beck of a stranger; and as she cried, some shame stole into her soul at the thought of how she had suffered herself to be bought.

But she had not laid down flesh and blood for gold, for until to-night she had not known that her own heart as well as Bobbie's weighed down Guy's gifts—though as a child in a fit of petulance will thrust away his choicest belonging, only to come back presently in tears to seek it, she knew now that to be Bobbie's sweetheart, would be a happier lot than to be Guy's wife.

'*Poor* Bobbie!' she cried aloud in her

misery, and some one who had approached through the darkness, and turned aside, thinking that she wept for Guy, drew nearer, and doubted his ears.

She had thrown him over for Guy, and now Guy was dead she came back to him as a *pis-aller*; yet as he stood there listening intently, hope warmed his breast, and as one who ventures to win rather than lose, he stepped forward, and said,—

'Letty!'

The sobs ceased . . . the night around ceased to be cold and wretched, the girl's heart flew to him, but her body stood fast as she said,—

'Is that you, Bobbie?'

She had not been face to face with him since she had ignored her tacit vows to him for her spoken promise to Guy, but somehow she knew that to-night she might fool him no more, before he said,—

'I am here, Letty, and you will give me my answer now, or never.'

CHAPTER IV.

It is a dark and dismal night,
The dew is falling down,
I will go home lest I should spoil
My cap and satin gown.

BOBBIE'S voice brought back the girl to reason—he had come too soon on the heels of the day's news, and she drew back ashamed, and with a more gentle thought for Guy than she had yet given him.

'You have heard that Captain Trefusis is reported as dead,' she said, feeling herself Lætitia all over as she said it, 'but you did not know him, and so you cannot be expected to feel . . . sorry.'

'Are you?' said Bobbie, with a fierceness that took her breath away.

Even at such a moment Tishy must be truthful, or die, and she said,—

'He was our cousin—and very good.'

'Is that all you have to say for the man who made you forget that you were promised to me?' cried Bobbie, passionately, and the change in his usually happy voice and temper struck Tishy with a remorse that made her cry out,

'But I never promised you, Bobbie. We loved one another, and that was all. We were boy and girl together, and you knew that I had to help father, and the boys.'

'Let them help themselves,' said Bobbie, with energy; 'look after yourself first, then me—for I'll be damned if I let you slip through my fingers a second time.'

Tishy receded a step, and coloured, partly with surprise, partly because he had dared to swear before her—why, his wits must be all disordered by love, poor fellow! but if he were violent, pray who could soothe him as well as she?

'Letty,' he said, more calmly, 'did

you ever love that fellow?—tell me the truth.'

'*Don't* call him a fellow, for he is dead,' said poor Tishy, 'and I wish now that I had been *kinder* to him—that I had loved him better.'

'And did he love you?' said Bobbie.

Tishy sighed. It was humiliating to confess that her departed lover had despised her charms, and here was Bobbie going the same road, for he had not paid her a single compliment yet.

'It seems to have been a queer bargain on both sides,' said Bobbie, 'and one that would not have satisfied *me*, I can tell you, Letty. Now, once for all, will you do as we used to say in our games as children—

> Tak' the red gowd frae your hair,
> And follow me for evermair?'

'There's no red gold to take away from it,' said Tishy, ruefully, 'except its colour, and I don't think that is as bright as it used to be.'

'Poor Letty!' he said, 'perhaps you have not been so very happy either; and all the time I was thinking of you as wild with joy at the idea of being a great lady. Yet this character would not suit you, and you would be twice as happy as my wife.'

'But what could we live on, Bobbie?' said the girl.

'Love!' said Bobbie, stoutly, 'and my pay.'

'And supposing *he* comes back?' she said.

'That's my business,' said Bobbie; 'I'll settle with him.'

'No,' said Tishy, with a firmness that astonished him. 'I made him a promise—and a Trefusis never breaks his word—if he will not release me, I must keep it.'

'If he comes back you will marry him?' said Bobbie, slowly.

'Yes,' she said, bravely, but with her heart sinking low.

'Then I will leave you to hope for his return,' said Bobbie, bitterly, and turned on his heel, and left her.

The girl stood still, with the cold wet and drizzle of the November night closing around her; yet a moment ago she was warm, for love was here, and there was music even in the anger of her lover's voice.

So the substance had followed the shadow, and Guy was dead, and Bobbie had forsaken her; he had said he would have her answer to-night, and he had got it, and would never trouble her again.

And she had thought that he loved her so, that she had only to whistle him back, and he would come at once, and bide her time, and accept her thankfully when she should have decently mourned for Guy.

But she could not follow a man who did not want her, a man who, once her slave, now gave himself the airs of her master; yet never had Tishy loved him so well, as, stumbling homeward through the darkness, she supposed that she had lost him. He had scolded her—he had been harsher to

her than Guy had ever been—for love strikes harder, and bruises deeper, than indifference ever can; but she knew that she would rather be beaten by Bobbie than cherished by Guy, as she laid her hand on the wicket gate of the parsonage, and started to find it held fast.

'Letty,' said a voice that thrilled her heart, and lightened it of every care, 'the first of January is your wedding-day—if Captain Trefusis is not here to keep it, I will come to you after noon for your answer—but I will not wait for you to make up your mind any longer than that.'

'Oh, Bobbie!' she cried, 'if he *does* come back, I will beg him so hard not to marry me, and I don't think he will want much pressing!'

'Then he *did* not love you?' said Bobbie, eagerly.

'Not a bit!' she said; 'but then, perhaps, that was partly because I did not love him.'

Tears were still in her eyes, but her voice was gay, and she was happy. Bobbie loved her, and the time would soon be passed, and they would be able to look their hearts' fill at one another, though now the darkness was between them.

In the parsonage yonder lights were shining, and there was the glow of a ruddy fire in the schoolroom window, . . . never had Tishy's heart been knit more closely to the joys she knew of, and more doubtful of those ambitious delights that had receded from her like the desert mirage.

'I say!' said a loud whisper close beside them. 'I do believe Tishy's "colloguing" at the gate with somebody. I hope to goodness *he's* not come back—don't you, Ned?'

'I expect it's Bobbie Sands,' answered a voice in the same key. 'She was always dead spoons on him, and she knows he'd never be ashamed of *us!*'

If Bobbie were not so mean as that, at

any rate he blessed his future brothers-in-law very heartily, as Tishy fled, and left him without the kiss that he had been so determined to snatch from her before they parted.

CHAPTER V.

I'll tak' the red gowd frae my head,
I'll follow you and beg my bread;
I'll tak' the red gowd frae my hair,
And follow you for evermair!—*Hynde Horn.*

A LITTLE absence is sometimes a good thing, and perhaps Bobbie knew it when he threw up his leave, and returned to Aldershot next morning without any further attempt to see Letty. For a week his silence moved her more than his wildest love-making could have done, then Fate sent a diversion in the shape of a letter from a person whom the family had conspired to forget—so clearly had she forgotten it.

She was a younger sister of Mr. Trefusis, and had married well, cutting the Gordian knot of her many family con-

nexions by one short sharp blow that had left her untroubled by request for alms or patronage throughout the whole seventeen years of her childless married life. But lately she had heard by a side-wind how Guy Trefusis (heir to that John, whose disappearance twenty years ago had furnished one of the sensations of a London season) had fallen in love with, and been accepted by her own niece, and was even now on his way home to marry the country maiden.

To be aunt to a country hoyden was one thing, to polish a future countess was another, and, however late in the day, Mrs. Transome decided to appear upon the scene, and early in December wrote a letter that created confusion in a remote Devonshire parsonage.

'Dear brother,' read Mr. Trefusis at the breakfast table with much perplexity, then, turning to the end of the letter, read out its signature—'Lætitia.'

'You were named after her, my dear,' he said, nodding at his youngest daughter. 'You were born before she married, and became such a fine lady—and your mother always said you were like her—but what can she want with me after a silence of seventeen years?'

He read the letter through, then said:

'Tishy, my girl, would you like to go to London?'

The girl's listless face brightened. Bobbie would be not so far off there, and the days might pass quicker than at home.

To be sure her experience of London had not been bright when with Cynthia she had gone on a visit to some homely people who had formerly lived close to them in the country, but with Mrs. Transome it might be different.

'I should like to go,' she said, and some of the boys whistled, and some looked disgusted, while Cynthia thought

of how dreary the December days and eternal stocking-mending would be without Tishy to share her toils.

'I don't understand it,' said Mr. Trefusis, laying down his spectacles on the letter, 'and there's something about your clothes here, my dear, she says: of course you have not got any.'

'It's rather cold weather, sir, for walking about in none,' said Ned, pertly.

'I suppose my sister means that you are not provided with clothes such as she wears herself,' said the father, turning a rebuking glance on his youngest son, 'but she says something about my taking you to Exeter to get a decent hat and frock—I mean gown—and she will see to the *et ceteras* when you reach town.'

'Borrowed plumes,' said Tommie, in high disdain; 'we've always managed to *clothe* ourselves till now without Mrs. Transome.'

'You must learn humility, my son,'

said Mr. Trefusis, rebukingly. 'When, some ten years since, I called on my brother at his town residence, he begged me not to mention my name to the servants, but to let them suppose I was a dun.'

'And you consented, father?' said Cynthia, indignantly.

'It was my duty,' said her father, simply. 'The poor and lowly owe their duties to the powerful and great, and they cannot neglect them without self-upbraiding.'

'And pray, sir,' said Ned, meekly, 'should we have had to treat Tishy with respect if she had become a countess?'

'Assuredly,' said Mr. Trefusis, as he rose to leave the breakfast-table; 'fetch your Prayer-book, and read your duty to your neighbour, my son; then *act* it, instead of gabbling it over each Sunday as a mere form of words.'

'Whew!' whistled Ned, as the door

closed. 'I'm precious glad you're not going to be a countess after all, Miss Tishy. As plain Mrs. Bobbie, I suppose we can be as free and easy with you as we please.'

'Only fancy *kow-towing* to one's own sister!' said Sharer, the eldest brother. 'If she chose to look down on us she might stop away, and it would be a long while before we rung her front-door bell, and were sent round to the servants' entrance.'

'Tishy would never do that,' cried two of the brothers, simultaneously, and rushed to her as she sat with tears falling into her plate, and a secret dread of leaving the safe home shelter that made her heart warm to the two honest souls that hugged her on either side, and bade her cheer up, for, whether a countess or plain Mrs. Bobbie, they would love her to her dying day.

She had never been more a Tishy than

when she saw them all off to the school (two miles distant), where they were moderately well taught for the modest sum of three pounds a-year a-piece.

And when she came back to the breakfast parlour, to find Cynthia among the ruins of cold porridge and tea, immersed in a letter, she drew near, and sat down beside her, with some vague thoughts of Bobbie, but none in particular of her Aunt Transome.

'Tishy,' said her sister, as, having read the letter carefully through, she laid it down, 'I don't pretend to understand it. Why does she remember us after seventeen years of silence? I think that in some wonderful way she must have heard that you were going to marry Guy, and she has *not* heard of his supposed death.'

'It does not matter much,' said Tishy, wearily, 'what she thinks. I should like the change, for I can't sleep at nights—

if only I could be clothed decently I would go.'

'She has arranged for that,' said Cynthia, consulting the letter. 'It is of herself she is thinking, not you. She would pass you off as a new kitchen-maid if you appeared before her in the dress you wear to-day.'

Cynthia had never met any high dignitaries, hence could not speak fearfully of them; and her voice, indeed, had that bitter ring that unmerited poverty often bestows.

'She means kindly,' said Tishy, not thinking at all about her gowns, but of Bobbie.

'Then you will go?' said Cynthia, a little coldly, 'in the gowns that she has paid for, packed in the very trunk she has bought—you will go on false pretences, Tishy, and presently be sent home as an impostor?'

'I could survive that,' said Letty,

impartially, 'if all of you, and Bobbie, were here to receive me. I think I will go, if it is only to see a pantomime, and there will be such a lot to talk about when I come back!'

'If you ever do,' said Cynthia, sighing.

'What is to prevent me?' said Tishy, amazed. 'We will sell our few remaining old clothes to put a little money in my purse, and I can run away at any moment, and be here in four hours!'

'But supposing you like it there?' said Cynthia, in a voice of grave foreboding. 'Mrs. Transome is a great lady; you will be introduced to the life that you would have figured in if you had married Guy, and remember that you have elected to be plain Mrs. Bobbie, with her tastes subordinate to her income.'

'It will not do me any harm,' said Letty, leaning her head wearily upon her hand; 'who knows but I shall get so disgusted with great ladyhood that I

shall be rejoiced to escape to you, and Bobbie?'

Cynthia sighed as she looked at her beautiful sister, so ignorant, yet thinking herself so worldly-wise, then crossed over, and touched fondly those red-gold plaits that often made Tishy irritable at their weight, and at the time it took to brush and braid them.

'Supposing,' said the elder sister, 'that you get to like the life so well that you do not *wish* to come back to us—or Bobbie?'

'As a poor relation who means to marry a pauper, I am not likely to be spoilt by adulation,' said Tishy, standing up, and looping a heavy plait that had fallen. The attitude showed her grand proportions to the fullest advantage, and a pang shot through Cynthia's heart as she thought how, as long as men had eyes, Tishy would have lovers, and, perhaps, poor Bobbie would be left in the lurch after all.

'And now for this coat and hat,' said Tishy; 'they will serve to break the shock of Guy's disappearance to her, for of course they must be black.'

'We shall have to go up to Exeter to-morrow,' said Cynthia; 'she has given the tailor's address, and evidently takes it for granted that you will appear on the day she has named—Monday.'

'To-day is Tuesday,' said Tishy; 'there is plenty of time for everything—even to change my mind.'

'Do,' said Cynthia, energetically; 'you will learn no good in that wicked London, and with that selfish old woman. Stay here quietly with us, and wait for Bobbie.'

'But I am not quite pleased with Bobbie,' said the younger girl with tears in her eyes; 'he did not adore me at all the other day—and was not in the least grateful when I as good as promised to marry him if Guy did not come back—

and he never paid me one single compliment!'

'The best sign he could give that he loved you,' said Cynthia, shrewdly; 'but take care your pique with him does not entangle you in a fresh flirtation, Tishy.'

'I never flirted,' said her sister, simply. 'I loved Bobbie, and I endured Guy; but I wonder if I *could* flirt if I had the chance?'

Her lovely head inclined itself to one side in musing, a dawning smile hovered about her ruddy lips, and, with a sudden foreboding of future trouble, Cynthia realised that she only knew one side of her sister's nature yet, and that the other was as yet a sealed book even to the girl herself.

'What have you decided, my dears?' said their father, opening the door in his usual gentle way; 'has Tishy settled to go, or stay?'

'To go, father,' said his favourite daughter, as she put both arms around his neck, and mingled her bright hair with his grey locks; 'but I'll come back, daddy, never fear.'

'God bless you, my dear,' he said, and kissed her; then went away to write the first letter he had addressed to his sister for nigh on eighteen years.

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CHAPTER VI.

Ye mauna put on the black, the black,
Nor yet maun ye the brown;
But the scarlet sae red, and the kerchies sae white,
And your bonnie locks hanging down.

'Miss Trefusis, ma'am,' and Tishy found herself advancing towards a tall, still beautiful woman, who had risen, but did not move a step forward to receive her.

But Tishy was tall as herself, and quite as cool; and, as their hands met, Mrs. Transome knew that she had done well in acknowledging the girl, and, calmly appraising her charms, found them of the very class likely to fetch most money in the most fastidious market in the world.

'But why are you in black, my dear?'

said her aunt when tea had been brought. 'I did not know of any recent death in the family.'

'I am in mourning for my cousin, Guy Trefusis,' said Tishy, as the butler handed her cream and sugar.

'Guy Trefusis is *dead!*' almost screamed Mrs. Transome; 'the man you were to have married on the first of next month!'

'Yes,' said Tishy, as she took a piece of bread and butter from a footman, 'he fell over a precipice the other day in Australia—or something—but we do not expect he will ever come back.'

Mrs. Transome gasped for a moment, then pulled herself together, and looked at the girl before her.

Blooming, serene, with the beauty-sleep of at least three hundred nights out of the year vouched for by her lustrous eyes and peach-like skin, Tishy by no means looked like a girl who, having barely escaped a countess-ship, and twenty

thousand a-year, had resigned herself to be a poor parson's daughter for the rest of her days.

'She knows she can do better,' thought her aunt, admiring the girl's magnificent *aplomb*, and respecting her for it; 'and upon my word I have more than half a mind to help her.'

Tishy had never been in such a room before, and her eyes wandered about it with serious admiration, but no surprise; somehow the space, and beauty, and proportion of the great house seemed natural to her, just as the narrow bounds and squalid surroundings of her home had unconsciously chafed her.

'Guy Trefusis was one of the handsomest and best-bred men about town,' said Mrs. Transome, watching her niece keenly; 'he was looked upon as a great *parti*—for he was certain to succeed to the peerage.'

'He was good-looking in the Trefusis

style,' said Tishy, with so much indifference that Mrs. Transome told herself there was really very little to alter in the girl—for she was half a fine lady already.

No, she would not pack the girl home just yet, as she had decided to do in the first stage of disappointment. She should have some clothes, be properly introduced, and, if she did not succeed, be bundled back to her parsonage at the season's end.

'But wearing black for a man who probably died months ago is ridiculous,' said Mrs. Transome; 'and yet—I don't know—it might make you more interesting; and there are no balls or gaieties at this time of year: but it must be black, with a difference. You have no evening dresses, I suppose?' she added, abruptly.

'None,' said Tishy, as calmly as if she had said 'a hundred.' I never dined

in anything but a linsey or a cotton gown in my life.'

'And your lover, Mr. Trefusis, what did he say?' said Mrs. Transome, who was rapidly becoming natural under the superior coolness of her young relation.

'I never asked his opinion,' said Tishy, calmly.

'And what on earth made him go off to Australia?' said Mrs. Transome, who was beginning to feel the situation too much for her.

'He wanted to find out something about John Trefusis before he claimed the title,' said Tishy; 'but every one said it was a wild-goose chase, so he got Colonel Carruthers to join him, and they went ostensibly kangaroo-hunting.'

'And you were fool enough to let him go?' said Mrs. Transome, sharply. 'If ever you get such a chance again, you will be one woman out of a million.'

'And supposing I don't want such

another chance?' said Tishy. 'Surely one might grow as tired of grandeur as of poverty?'

'If you think so,' said Mrs. Transome, suddenly losing her temper (a vulgarity she rarely permitted herself), 'the sooner you go home to your father the better.'

'I will go now,' said Tishy, rising; 'if I had known that you only asked me as Guy's future wife, I would not have come here at all.'

She moved proudly away as she spoke; but when her hand touched the door, a voice half-way across the beautiful room cried, 'No; stay with me, Lætitia!'

The girl looked back, there were tears on the cold proud face, that in youth might have been so like her own, there was a lonely look about the tall, slightly bent shape, and, moved by a sudden impulse of pity, the girl went up to the elderly great lady, and kissed her.

'I will stay,' she said; 'but you must not

despise me because I am poor and ill-dressed. Father is even poorer, and worse-dressed still.'

'I have neglected my duty to you all,' said Mrs. Transome, touched through all her worldliness by the girl's kiss and words. Alas! that the first generous impulse that had moved her since girlhood should be destined to bear such worldly fruit, for within a fortnight Tishy was on the highroad to become a fine lady, and before the month and the day were up, she had absolutely forgotten Bobbie.

CHAPTER VII.

Young man, you've shaped a weed for me,
Among your summer flowers;
Now I will shape another for you,
Among the winter showers.

MRS. TRANSOME had fallen in love with her niece, and thrown herself heart and soul into her prospects. Fortunately there was nothing artificial to undo where Nature had done so much—the grand simplicity of the girl's manners might pass muster as the finest breeding in the best company in London; and when her aunt found that in conversation she invariably led persons to talk of themselves, instead of turning attention on herself, she knew that Letty would become popular as something more than a beauty, and have as many middle-aged lovers as young ones.

If her complexion had something of the insolence of youth, she had none of its foolish airs, and though dressed in mourning, and only seen in the Park or her aunt's drawing-rooms, had already triumphantly run the gauntlet of some of the best judges of women in England.

The freshness and naturalness that had attracted Guy, wearied with a long course of fashionable beauties, produced precisely the same effect upon the men of fashion who now saw her, wakening in them those more robust, healthy instincts, that were stifled in the fumes of five-o'clock tea, dispensed in boudoirs by women who pulled their red blinds down as religiously as they disgraced their husbands, and (for the most part) died in the odour of sanctity.

But a girl who would face you in the clear morning light without a flaw or fleck on her satin skin—who might be found walking with her aunt's collie in the Park at eight o'clock in the morning, with a

colour on her cheek that could not eclipse in beauty the shade of her hair—a woman, too, of unexceptionable birth, who had barely escaped being a very great lady, only to be probably made a greater one, being herself, and Mrs. Transome's niece, was she not sufficient to make a quiet Saturday-evening reception at Transome House more interesting than one of the best political dinners of the winter season?

It was just the time of year when town becomes as suddenly full as it is suddenly emptied again within a few days of Christmas, and everybody that one knows is to be met with at some time or other of the day in Bond Street, or at the play.

And very soon the lovely Lætitia's name became pretty well aired in club ranks, and gradually degenerated into the abbreviation that was clearly her fate whether she became a great lady or no.

'The lovely Tishy,' so she was called in

every club-room of note, by more than one man who sighed for, but was not rich enough to buy her.

As yet Tishy had kept clear of entanglements, for in the easy, luxurious routine of her new life the heart was never needed nor the wooer missed. Even the senses do not assert themselves when so amply satisfied, and moreover she was a slave just then to a passion that invariably beats love out of the field—millinery.

Linsey-woolsey is capable of so few variations; and Letty had never fully realised her own beauty, or how certain combinations might throw fresh lights upon it, as when in private she was fitted with this and that, till gradually she dwindled from black to lavender, and thence to the pure white, that became her magnificent colouring best.

Mrs. Transome felt her own youth and beauty renewed in the girl, as she filled the part of high-priestess at these cere-

monies, and longed to repeat her own brilliant success in life without loss of time.

It was entirely owing to her aunt's *finesse* that Letty had hitherto been kept so free of lovers. The round table that was filled nightly at Transome House might hold the most successful men, the finest judges of beauty in England, but no young men, however eligible, were admitted, and Letty's value was tripled by the impossibility of approaching her.

But one day it happened that the girl, being absorbed in the contemplation of herself in a gold-coloured tissue that somehow seemed to have caught the reflection of her hair, felt a sharp, sudden prick of memory, and crying out, 'It is a month and a day, and he will be waiting for me!' wrung her hands and burst out crying, to the utter rout and confusion of Mrs. Mason's young lady, and of Mrs. Transome. The latter motioned the woman away, then came slowly back to Letty,

with anger and surprise on her haughty face.

'And pray who is Bobbie?' she said, with withering contempt.

'I promised to marry him!' said Letty, with tears splashing down on her beautiful bare neck, 'but I'd forgotten all about it, and he'll be waiting for me now in the spinney.' . . . .

Hitherto Mrs. Transome had not said a syllable to her niece of her views. But now she said, bending on Letty a look before which she quailed,—

'It is not certain yet that Guy Trefusis is dead, or for that matter that his cousin John is, who may have a dozen children for all we know, but your first duty is to him, and when we are sure that he is dead, we can deal with—Bobbie.'

'But I love him,' said Tishy, pale and wild, to the confusion of harmony between herself and the gold tissue that hung half on, and half off her ravishing figure; 'and

he loves me—he actually swore at me because he was afraid I should throw him over!'

Mrs. Transome shuddered. She was so accustomed to see well-bred men behaving in all respects as head-butlers to their wives' establishments, without daring to question their proceedings, or do more than minister to their entire comfort.

'And is Bobbie a—a costermonger?' she said, closing her eyes as at a painful sensation.

'He is in the Rifles,' said Letty, drying her eyes on one of those gossamer handkerchiefs to which she had become as easily accustomed as to the machinery of the life of a great lady; 'we were brought up together as babies, and we have always loved one another. I only accepted Guy because I thought it was my duty to my family.'

'I ought to have taken you in hand ten years ago,' said Mrs. Transome, drily; 'but your promise to Bobbie can be only re-

deemed after we have received positive confirmation of Guy's death. And now, if you please, we will go on with your fitting.'

And in point of fact, while Letty dried her eyes, and adjusted a lace tucker, Bobbie was waiting for her in the spinney adjoining the parsonage, without an idea but that Letty was inside it.

He had only got down late overnight, and his father was not yet risen, and the deaf old housekeeper disinclined for gossip, and he had not been to town, or in the Park once since he went away, so knew nothing of Letty's translation to a more aristocratic world.

The grey church yonder was shut—there was no wedding to-day, and she would be here soon; but as twelve struck Bobbie's heart sank, and he thought that this carelessness of time did not augur on her part eager love.

How often lately he had thought that he had been rough with her that dark

November night, and perhaps he had turned her love from him, or there was somebody else. . . .

The boughs overhead were laced with finest, snowiest filagree—it was a new and glorified spinney compared with that dripping, sodden one in which he had found Tishy sobbing her heart out for love of somebody who assuredly was not Guy.

Was that a step on the snow behind him? He turned, and clasped in his arms, not Tishy, but Cynthia.

Why did they wear the same shape of cloak and hood, why were they of the same height and at a distance exactly alike, though Cynthia was plain, and Tishy lovely?'

'Tishy is away,' said Cynthia, ignoring his mistake; 'did you not know it? I only came out here by chance, for I thought you must have seen her in town, or that she had written to you.'

'She is in London?' shouted Bobbie.

'Yes, with Mrs. Transome—perhaps you have met our aunt there?'

'Who has not?' said Bobbie, fiercely; 'the greatest untitled lady in town, who lives but for ambition and to marry her *débutantes* well. . . . Letty will come back to you as fine a lady as her aunt, if ever she comes back at all.'

'She is altered,' said Cynthia, in a subdued voice that matched her sad looks. 'She does not write us half such hearty and loving letters as she did—somehow she seems to have got out of tune with us, and we with her.'

Their faces were to the coppice, their ears against the wind, they had not heard the steps approaching over the snow behind them, and started violently as a voice said, hesitatingly, 'Letty?'

So for the second time within five minutes she was to play her sister's ugly double, she thought, as she turned to come face to face with Guy Trefusis.

Gaunt, haggard, he looked less like a bridegroom, than a Lazarus newly risen from the dead; and Bobbie, who had drawn back, felt less and less respect for Letty's taste as he regarded his rival, and more and more satisfaction with himself.

'Letty is in London,' said Cynthia, repeating her lesson bravely. 'She did not expect you. We thought you were dead.'

'I have been in trouble,' said Guy, with some flitting sense of surprise at the sulkiness of the figure (that he supposed to be Cynthia's lover) in the foreground, 'but I did all on earth that a man could do to be here in time——'

'And you are just too late, sir,' said Bobbie, advancing, 'for Miss Trefusis promised that if you were not here in time to keep your part of the bargain, she would marry *me*.'

'I offer you my best congratulations,' said Guy, bowing low, and turning on his heel left Cynthia and the young man together.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ye couldna see her yellow hair,
For gowd and pearls that were so rare,
By th' bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

If the remote Devonshire village in which Guy found himself had been a seaboard parish and owned a port, he would have chartered a ship and gladly sailed that very hour for Australia, but as it was, he caught a train back to town, and more from habit than inclination strolled into the 'Rag and Famish' in search of dinner. A few men were there, recalled to town from dull country houses by apocryphal home news of death and disaster, and one or two of them looked up at the haggard, handsome man in his grey clothes, who seemed

to have forgotten how to order a dinner. He looked listlessly at a paper, then threw it down, and plunging his hand into his pocket, pulled out a curious-looking document, with wax hearts dangling, that he mechanically tore into pieces, the stubborn paper wrestling with his strong fingers, but at last overcome by them.

A man at a table hard by chuckled, and thought how cheap that special marriage license, which was not used, would come in the end; but Guy was wondering with what ceremonies an aborigine maiden suffered herself to be wed—even if it were possible to catch her?

How hot the room was, though in midwinter! how stifling the air! how had he ever put up with it without disgust in the days before he went kangaroo-hunting with Carruthers? He got up abruptly, and went out, meeting on the very threshold a man who knew not only everybody, but everybody's business, and who started

back at the sight of Guy as though he had been a ghost.

'Good God!' he said, no more meaning to be blasphemous than is any other man when he is frightened into recollection of his religion. 'Why, we thought you were dead—does the lovely Tishy know of your return?'

'The lovely *who?*' said Guy, haughtily.

'Miss Trefusis,' said the gossip, with some change of front: 'she is with her aunt in Grosvenor Square, you know—Mrs. Transome—I was just going there, and I may congratulate you on marrying the most beautiful woman in town.'

'Where are the others?' said Guy, thinking aloud, after his brusque way, not improved on by savage experience. 'You are going to Mrs. Transome's to-night? Well, take me with you, and you shall see how Miss Trefusis welcomes me.'

'As you are?' said the other man, glancing at Guy's dress.

'Oh! my clothes are at the Bristol,' said Guy, carelessly. 'I only arrived at daybreak, and am off again to-morrow if I can get a ship—so I've unpacked nothing.'

'Have you seen this evening's papers?' said the other. 'If not, you had better turn in, and have a look at them. You will find something that concerns you.'

Guy Trefusis shrugged his shoulders.

'I shall be gone by to-morrow this time,' he said. 'What on earth does it matter what twaddle the papers talk about me?'

'But this is fact,' said the other, drily. 'Look in the obituary, and you will find your namesake.'

The young fellow turned wearily—thinking of Yuntha, not the newspapers.

He took the journal that his friend thrust into his hand; and read down the list of deaths mechanically, till a filbert nail pointed impatiently to a couple of lines that Guy read aloud:

'On the fourteenth of October, in

Australia, John Trefusis, twelfth Earl of Thor, aged forty-five.'

On the fourteenth of October, at the very time when he was recklessly beating the bush for Yuntha, and counting time by the settler's clock to know if he might be home in time to save his faith and honour for Tishy. . . .

'I will go with you,' he said, carelessly. 'I have nothing to do to-night, and to-morrow I go abroad.'

His old acquaintance, as they turned into the street side by side, understood better why the divine Tishy's splendid bloom had never faded for the loss of her absent, or missing lover, and admired her the more sincerely in his soul, for he thought a beautiful woman wasted on an unappreciative spouse was as true an object of pity as any poor animal in whose aid an efficient board sometimes interfered, too late.

'When you have dressed,' said Guy's

cicerone, airily, 'we will walk round, and you will have a few moments alone with the fair Trefusis.'

'Is there any party there to-night?' said Guy, stopping short.

'A party on New Year's evening? My dear fellow,' said Major de Carteret in amazement, 'why there is not a living soul in town!—it was out of compliment to yourself, I believe, that Mrs. Transome and Miss Trefusis remained for Christmas. And on second thoughts I won't go with you. I should be *de trop*—see you to-morrow, old man;' and waving his hand gaily, he left Guy on the steps of the 'Bristol,' and passed on.

Now at that very moment Mrs. Transome took up an evening paper, and saw the announcement that Major de Carteret had shown Guy.

She gave a little shriek, and called Tishy, who came with thoughts full of Bobbie, and none for Guy.

'It's a pity that lover of yours ever went out to Australia,' said Mrs. Transome, in a dissatisfied tone. 'You will never do better—the accumulations of money since John Trefusis' disappearance must be something enormous. And his place in Cornwall is one of the most magnificent in England.'

'Perhaps he may come back again after all,' said Letty, listlessly.

'And if he does, you will marry him?' said Mrs. Transome, quietly.

'I told Bobbie so,' said the girl, sitting down opposite her aunt. 'I said that if Guy came back, and would not release me from my promise, I should marry him.'

'You would ask him to release you?' said her aunt, sitting erect and horror-struck. 'Why, you must be mad to think of such a thing. Of course you must hold him to his bargain, until you are certain of securing something better!'

'But I promised Bobbie,' said Tishy,

who, after forgetting the young man for a whole month, seemed all at once possessed by him, to Mrs. Transome's amazement, and the threatened confusion of all her plans.

'And, pray, did Guy Trefusis know anything of your little agreement with—Bobbie?' said her aunt, pronouncing the obnoxious name gingerly.

'No,' said Tishy. 'How should he? It was made after he left.'

'And if he returns, you mean to tell him of it?' said Mrs. Transome, with cold contempt. 'Now, promise me one thing,' she added, 'or from to-night I will concern myself no further with yourself and prospects—that if Lord Thor returns, you will leave me to deal with him. You can run away to your room—though into his arms would be better—or faint, or go into hysterics, but you are not to say one syllable till I have spoken.'

'I promise,' said Tishy, feeling certain

that she never would be called upon to redeem it; and as she spoke, the butler entered with a note for his mistress.

'From Major de Carteret, ma'am,' he said, as he withdrew.

So the amusing old gossip would not call this evening, Tishy thought, as she restlessly left her chair and moved slowly down the delightful rooms, to which she had become as used as to the shabby parsonage, with its rags and general destitution.

Yes, she thought, as she caught sight of herself in a mirror as she passed, her heart might be Bobbie's, but her tastes, her birth, inclined her to this life of luxury, in which she had no need to even think, but was asked only to look lovely, and be herself.

Mrs. Transome had insisted on the girl's putting on a white satin gown that evening, and had herself braided her hair with pearls and diamonds, and the men-servants

who had waited at table afterwards gave it as their opinion below stairs that if ever a bridegroom was to be pitied for being too late for his wedding, that man was Captain Trefusis. But when the item of news that Mrs. Transome had already discovered, met the butler's eye in his own special paper, he slapped his side, and swore that of the two, he thought the bride was far more to be pitied than the bridegroom.

'She couldn't have done better,' he said, unconsciously echoing his mistress, 'and she might do a deal worse, and I've heard a word dropped of some low pauper fellow who's been hanging round her in the country.'

'Mrs. Transome would never permit that,' said the housekeeper; 'it's my belief she means to adopt Miss Letty, and leave her her fortune.'

The butler rose with an outraged air as the drawing-room bell rang, but was

astounded to find his mistress in the hall, and with some signs of unusual excitement on her haughty features.

'Saunders,' she said, 'I expect the Earl of Thor here almost immediately — you will show him into the library, and on no account permit Miss Trefusis to know he is here, or come downstairs till I send for her.'

'Very good, ma'am,' said the trained servant, without a shade of surprise. 'You expect no one else to-night, I believe, ma'am?'

'Major de Carteret may possibly call, but you will admit no one else;' then re-ascended to the drawing-room, where Letty was still wandering about full of a suppressed excitement that would not permit her to sit still.

'Was that a ring?' she said, starting violently, as a faint echo reached her ear; 'it is too late for *him* to come to-night, is it not?' she added, wistfully.

'Are you expecting your bucolic admirer?' said Mrs. Transome, calmly; 'you may be sure of one thing, that he will not see you if he comes!'

And with the coldest look she had ever yet given her niece, Mrs. Transome rose and left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

If I had kent what I ken now,
That love it was sae ill to win,
I should ne'er hae wet my cherry cheek
For onie man or woman's son.

WHEN the library door opened, Guy, who had expected to see Letty, drew back a step at the sight of the tall, still beautiful woman, who was well known in society as the most heartless match-maker in town.

Mrs. Transome had not expected to see so handsome a young man, nor yet so haggard an one, and despised the perversity of Letty's taste for Bobbie as she advanced with outstretched hand, saying, 'We had almost given you up—but better late than never!'

Guy took her hand under protest, and wondered how much Tishy had taken her aunt into her confidence, or how little.

'I reached Upthorn at half-past twelve to-day,' he said, 'taking with me a special marriage license, as I knew it was not possible to get there by noon; but I found myself entirely unexpected, and the field in possession of a man who informed me that Miss Letty Trefusis had given him the refusal of her hand, if I should arrive too late for the marriage.'

'I have heard of him,' said Mrs. Transome, negligently, as she leaned back in her chair, and yawned slightly; 'a country bumpkin whom Letty was too kind-hearted to treat as he deserved, and who gave himself airs in 'consequence. The best proof of her contempt of him is that she was not even there to redeem her supposed promise.'

'Nor to keep her engagement with me?' said Guy, sternly. 'I came through a

hundred difficulties and sacrifices,' he added, bitterly, 'to keep faith with her, yet she could not even wait to see if I broke it, but rushed into a fresh compact without delay.'

'If you had seen her crying passionately this morning,' said Mrs. Transome, 'as I did, you would not be so bitter against her. She thought you had forgotten her —for she never believed that you were dead — and only a moment before you came here to-night,' added Mrs. Transome, deliberately, 'we were speaking of you. At this moment she does not know that you are here;' and she rose as though to ring the bell.

'Stay,' said Guy, and his agitation gave Mrs. Transome the clue to Letty's indifference; 'let me tell you first, that if my honour binds me to your niece, my heart is given elsewhere, and that both on her side and mine ours will be but a loveless match.'

'You should have taken all this into consideration before your wedding day,' said Mrs. Transome, haughtily; 'and as a man of honour you will fulfil your part of the compact, if my niece is willing to perform hers. It seems to me that your own unfaithfulness has condoned any harmless flirtation of hers with the young man you saw this morning, but this will be a matter for you to settle between yourselves.'

Guy stood as one turned to stone. He saw Yuntha retreating, Tishy thrust into his unwilling arms. His soul revolted at the thought, his flesh recoiled from the lovely Devonshire milkmaid, and clove to the slender shape, in its tattered green leaves that he had sought for with such desperate longing. . . . .

'I will send her to you,' said Mrs. Transome, rising; and without further word left him alone; but the minutes passed, and a half-hour had been chimed out in silvern tongue from the clock on the

chimney-piece when the door opened, and beautiful Letty, in her satin gown and hair braided with jewels, stood before him.

CHAPTER X.

'Keep on, keep on your kaims,' he said,
'You needna tak' them frae your head,'
Then down he loot his cloutie fa',
And the red gowd shone owre him a'.

He thought of Yuntha, and she of Bobbie; . . . . then in the natural way that made even her premeditated actions appear accidental, she held up her face for him to kiss her.

A bridegroom could do no less than kiss his bride on her wedding day, and chivalry bent Guy's lips to the girl's cheek, but made him recoil from the round white arm that touched his shoulder . . . . Where had she learned such tricks? In town or from her country lover?

'Ignore everything except that he is back in time,' had been the lesson Mrs. Transome had drilled into her niece during the past half-hour. 'As a man of honour he cannot release *you*—as a woman of sense you will decline to release *him*. Leave all details to me.'

'You look ill, Guy,' said Tishy, as she sat down opposite him full in the lamp's light, with some traces of anxiety on her own features that did not escape his attention.

'You have been fretting for me, Tishy?' he said, brusquely, and with intention.

'We feared you were dead,' she said, playing with the fringes of her bodice, while he looked at her with a heart cold as ice, wondering if this could be the rustic beauty in a cotton gown, whose image he had taken with him to Australia.

With the blackness of the old oak chair behind her, with the rich gloom beyond,

out of which now and then showed in the firelight the sober gleam of a priceless picture, or the dull red and gold of a piece of tapestry, Tishy seemed to be as perfectly at one with her surroundings as when among the raspberry bushes; and in pity for her very poverty and courage, he had asked her to be his wife.

'And did your lover fear it, too?' he said; 'was it from the fear or the hope of my death that he was waiting for you in the spinney this morning?'

'We have been playfellows ever since we were children,' said Tishy, negligently, as she put up one hand to touch the jewels in her hair; 'and I made him a foolish sort of promise once, that if I did not marry anybody else, I would marry him.'

'And you thought that was honourable to him—and me?' said Guy, sternly, his moral sense keen from a recent course of training of which poor Tishy knew nothing.

'And since we have parted, you have

said and done nothing that is not honourable towards yourself and me?' said Tishy, with spirit.

He did not attempt to answer, though he heard her . . . . for the first time Tishy realised as she looked at him, that here was a man whom another woman might love as well as she loved Bobbie, and that faint, cold instinct, less jealousy than intolerance of seeing her rights invaded, roused the cruelty that is latent in every woman's nature, and hardened her to make him suffer for his unfaith.

Only an hour ago her whole heart and soul had set in a swirl of love and regret towards her people and the man she loved . . . . she had seemed to throw off the charm of the life she was leading, and see how much better and happier was that honest one she had forgotten; but now she thought only of how powerfully she could benefit those lives at home without sharing them, while she put the thought of

Bobbie by till later, when she would be alone.

'Have you fallen in love with a black woman?' she said, with a careless vivacity that fell on his mood of bitter earnest like a jarring discord; 'well, I will forgive you —since I have been flirting a little too— and we will make a compact not to flirt any more till we are—married!'

He looked at her in wonder. Was this the honest country girl, whose truth and straightforwardness had commanded his respect? Was this mere acting, that he might not know how gallantly she was sacrificing her love and herself, to help her father and the family?

'Tishy,' he said, taking the hand that was so much more soft and beautiful than when he had held it last, 'there is plenty of money for us all—for you and your lover—and for those at home—why should you and I sacrifice our lives to a foolish promise?'

'A foolish promise?' said Tishy, slowly, 'I never looked upon it as one. You asked me to be your wife, I have waited for you, and you are here.'

How quick the weed of worldliness had sprung up in her, thought Guy as he dropped her cold hand and turned aside. She had learned her lesson well above stairs, and without dishonour he could not break the promise he had come so far and so painfully to keep.

'You have told me nothing of your adventures,' said Tishy, who had sat down again and taken up some scrap of lace work that lay near; 'so you did not fall over the precipice after all, or did some kind person pick you up at the bottom of it?'

'Then you will not release me, Tishy?' he said, sternly, and as if she had not spoken.

'No,' she said, calmly; 'our engagement is too publicly known, and your return will shortly be better known still. I could

not allow myself to be made the talk of the town even to oblige your — black person.'

She was looking at him full with those blue eyes that were so unlike Yuntha's as she spoke, and she saw how he winced under her allusion, and knew that she had by chance hit truth in the bull's eye.

'But your eyes are red, Tishy,' he cried, 'and your satin gown and pearls do not become you as well as the cotton frock your brothers were not afraid to touch—you are sacrificing your happiness to ambition, and some day you will find out what a bitter bad bargain you have made.'

For a moment Tishy's heart sank—had not Bobbie told her the same thing only the other day? But the dim recesses of a mirror, to which she lifted her eyes, told her another tale, and the thought of a different woman standing by Guy's side, as Countess of Thor, hardened her heart, and roused in her that dogged determination

that made a Trefusis bad to turn when once he had determined on his course.

'When you went away,' she said, slowly, 'I was not sure that I might not love you in time—if you altered in some things—but, afterwards, quite lately, I found out that I loved somebody else. He loved me as you never did or could, and begged me to be his wife, but I told him that I was bound by my promise to you, and stood firm to it, and what a woman can do, surely a man may.'

He bowed silently; but if ever a proud man's heart went near to breaking, it was his in that moment.

If Tishy had been the honest country girl then that she once was, she would have run to him, and cried out, 'Take back your promise—what is so dear to you, is cheap to me!'

But already her pride was stooping itself to her surroundings, and it was with a profound sense of relief that she heard the

door open behind her, and turned to see Mrs. Transome entering, with Major de Carteret on her heels.

'I hope I don't intrude?' said the lady, in her negligent way, as she approached. 'Ah, I see you are already acquainted,' she added to her companion, as the two men exchanged some sort of greeting.

'Going to ride to-morrow, Miss Trefusis?' said Major de Carteret, looking keenly from one to the other of the young people.

'My niece can neither be expected to keep old engagements now, nor make fresh ones,' said Mrs. Transome, laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, 'since that Lord Thor is here,' and she turned slightly towards the haggard, handsome young man. 'Miss Trefusis' time will of course be devoted to him.'

'And all the other young fellows,—and old ones like me—be left out in the cold!' said Major de Carteret, ruefully; 'however Thor and I are old friends, so perhaps he'll trust you to me sometimes.'

'No doubt,' said Mrs. Transome; 'and now I fear I must be so inhospitable as to turn you both out, for it is late, and Miss Trefusis has had a trying day—that ends happily,' she added, smiling coldly at Guy as she gave him her hand. 'Good-bye then till to-morrow.'

'Good-night,' said Tishy, first to one man, then to the other, and without a shade of difference in her voice, and glance at either, passing Guy as he held the door open for her, with no more sign than if he had been her footman.

'Tell you what it is, my boy,' said the elder man, as he buttoned up his great-coat on the doorstep, 'it's quite certain that you will make the handsomest pair in the town, and I'm hanged if I don't believe you'll be the best bred. By the way, I think you talked of going abroad again immediately. Why don't you? It is quite the fashion for engaged people not to see much of each other after their wedding day is once fixed.

And you may be quite certain of Mrs. Transome taking very good care of her, unless a duke proposes, and then I don't think you would have much chance. Ta-ta, old man, see you to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XI.

If ye love me, my lady gay,
As ye protest you do,
Then turn your love from this gay knight,
And reach your hand to me!

BOBBIE'S exultation at the bridegroom having arrived too late for the wedding, did not last many seconds after Guy had bowed his congratulations, and left the young man and Cynthia together.

'He is the Earl of Thor, now,' she said, as one thinking aloud, 'and Tishy will marry him, for she has made up her mind to be a fine lady.'

'You have no right to judge her so meanly,' cried Bobbie, feeling his light heart change to lead; 'she always keeps her promises, and she won't break hers to me.'

'But he *was* in time,' said Cynthia, gravely; 'it is she who has failed in the bargain, for he had the special license in his pocket, and they could have been married in the schoolroom, or out here in the spinney—or anywhere.'

Bobbie stood rigid, his arms hanging at his sides, his black eyes staring straight before him.

'So she was playing the fool with me,' he said at last. 'She never loved me any more than she loved him—the only living soul she cares for is herself.'

'No, she loves you,' cried Cynthia, who knew her sister's heart as plain Tishy, well enough; 'but Mrs. Transome is a worldly woman who will insist on her marrying Guy; and also, I am afraid that Tishy has become so worldly too, that she will not make much fuss; but she would be a miserable woman,' added Cynthia, her hot tears dropping fast on the snow; 'and I believe that even at the last moment her heart would fail her,

and she would run away to us—the dear warm-hearted, lovely soul that we all love, and are so proud of.'

Some of the hardness went out of Bobbie's eyes as the girl spoke, and he recalled the look of heartfelt relief with which Guy had looked at him in his character of Letty's lover.

The Earl of Thor plainly did not love Letty any better than she loved him, and should a worldly old woman, and the turning of a country girl's head spoil three precious lives?

'I will give her time to think about it,' he said at last. 'It would be ridiculous if Lord Thor and I were tripping up each other's heels on her doorstep; but I will go up to town to-morrow, and see her next morning.'

'She will not be allowed to see you,' said Cynthia, sadly. 'If I were you, Bobbie, I would wait.'

'For what?' said Bobbie.

'Till you hear from her,' said Cynthia,

trembling as she had never thought to tremble before her own, and Tishy's playfellow.

'Till she has had leisure to be talked over by that old Jezebel, and made to humiliate herself to a man who doesn't want to marry her?' cried Bobbie, looking black, and fierce, and passionate enough to satisfy even Tishy (who hated fair men on principle). 'I have a good mind to catch the very train that fellow is going up by, and see her to-night.'

'Don't go,' cried Cynthia; 'as you said it would be ridiculous your arriving there together, she could not listen to you both at the same time.'

'She may perjure herself fifty times over,' said Bobbie, doggedly; 'but she loves me, and I will save her from herself if I can. She shall not be bought and sold by Mrs. Transome, or anybody else, without being given a chance; but if she is heartless as you think, why, she may go, and never be troubled by any of us again.'

'That is what the boys say,' said Cynthia, sighing heavily; 'they never thought she would change so quickly . . . . and all in a short three weeks—she cried when she went away, and she promised to be back for Christmas; indeed we all thought it was only for the chance of seeing *you* that she went.'

'I saw some paragraphs in the society papers about Mrs. Transome's beautiful niece, Miss Trefusis,' said Bobbie; 'but how was I to know it was Letty, when I had not the least idea Mrs. Transome was your aunt? I could have gone up to see her every week if I had only known, and if the door were shut against me, have seen her in the street.'

'You should not have gone off in such a hurry,' said Cynthia, as she turned her pale face homewards, 'she loved you dearly, but I think you two will never marry now—no, never!'

A faint whistle sounded in the distance—a puff of smoke showed far away through

the skeleton trees. Guy was on his way back to town—and Tishy.

'She *can't* have changed so entirely in this short time,' burst out Bobbie, his eyes following the dwindling smoke; 'you have not seen her, so how can you tell? For all we know she may have expected me to go to her in town, instead of coming here for her answer.'

Cynthia shook her head. Tishy had found her wings, and would not fold them yet awhile for love of either home or Bobbie.

'Well,' said the young man, grimly, 'I don't envy your sister the two interviews before her—unless she means to act like an honest woman, which you don't seem to think her. In the first one she will have to accept a man who doesn't care two pins for her; in the second she will have to look in the face, and for the last time jilt the man she really loves, for I'll never ask her again, so help me, heaven!'

Poor Bobbie!' said Cynthia, not knowing which of the three she pitied most—he, or Guy, or Tishy—she was almost inclined to give Guy the palm, since at least the others had love, while he had none.

'Don't pity me,' cried Bobbie, so fiercely that she jumped with surprise. 'It's bad enough to be a mere slave to her, to long myself sick for a sight of her, to love her so that the loss of her has made me a cantankerous, bad-tempered fellow, whom everybody fights shy of——'

'No, no,' cried Cynthia, her heart aching for him; 'we all love you here as well as ever—even *she* does, if only she will be true to herself, and stand firm against that worldly old woman.'

'Would the talking of fifty worldly old men move *me?*' cried Bobbie, as the two came to that wicket-gate by which Tishy's heart had leaped for joy at the sound of her lover's voice; 'but she has got some notions in her head of her duty to her family—

poor soul' (and Bobbie's voice softened, and the bitter, worn look partly left his face), 'and I told her that her duty was to herself and me—and for the first time in our lives I was rough with her—and though she didn't seem angry then, perhaps she thought of it afterwards, and it turned her against me.'

'She never loved you so well as then,' cried Cynthia, warmly; 'if only you had stayed—' and with tears in her eyes, she looked at the shabby house that seemed empty and cold now that there was not Tishy's bright gay beauty, and voice to warm and fill it.

'Father takes it so to heart,' she went on in the sad subdued way that had become natural to her of late; 'he blames himself for having let her go. He says Aunt Lætitia will make Tishy as worldly-minded as herself for a time, and then—then—our sister will be a wretched woman for the remainder of her life.'

And why doesn't he exercise his authority over her and bring her back?' cried Bobbie.

'He might have done so yesterday,' said Cynthia; 'but not to-day—Guy's return has reversed everything, and if he and Tishy make up their differences, of course father could not interfere to separate them, and they may as well be together at Aunt Transome's as here.'

'And yet your father is not worldly-minded,' said Bobbie, bitterly; 'I wonder what he would have said if I had gone to him a year ago, and asked him for Letty?'

'He would have given her to you gladly,' cried Cynthia, eagerly. 'He always suspected that you loved one another, and was uneasy when Guy came—for just then, you know, Bobbie, you were away.'

'And Letty must have a lover,' said the young man, drily.

'She is so lovely,' said Cynthia; 'and it is

so dull here . . . . and she *used* to love us all dearly, and would have sacrificed herself for us twenty times over . . . . but *now* if she marries Guy it will be for herself.'

'And supposing that I bring her back with me, to you *here*, to-morrow?' said Bobbie, his grasp on the wicket that seemed to live and renew in him the thrill that passed through Letty's hand when his own touched hers, and he felt her body turn towards him in the darkness.

'When the sun and moon dance on that green,
And that will never be!'

quoted Cynthia with hard, deep-drawn sobs checking her speech; 'she will *never* come back, Bobbie, to you or to me!'

'Dear old Cinders,' said Bobbie, roused out of his own selfish thoughts by the girl's sorrow, 'don't fret—I'll make a last try—and who knows but to-morrow night we three shall be standing here together, loving each other all the better for what we have gone through?'

'It may be so,' said Cynthia, as she thought of the long evening, and mill-round of boys' lessons that lay before her, with a to-morrow of drearier waiting still; 'but how shall I know? Will you telegraph to me if you are coming?'

'And have the whole parish know our affairs before we know them ourselves?' said Bobbie. 'No—but if I am not here by ten o'clock to-morrow night, you will know that I have failed.'

'Good luck go with you!' said the girl, and perhaps out of pure pity, or because she was only Letty's sister, kissed her old playfellow's cheek, then turned, and went stumbling up the gravel path to the lonely house.

CHAPTER XII.

How oft she tried to drown the flame,
And oft wept bitterlie;
But still she lov'd the hireman chiel,
So well he pleased her e'e.

GUY passed a night of madness, but at ten o'clock next morning changed his clothes, and without pausing to eat, drove to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where he was at first received by his solicitors as his ghost, so sincerely had they recently regretted his decease, and the loss of his business as the new Earl of Thor.

He asked for the documents that attested the death of John Trefusis, and was shown a duly signed certificate, and certain proofs that removed all doubt

that it was the long missing man who had died at the place, and on the date mentioned.

These papers had preceded Guy by a single mail only, and were forwarded by a solicitor of the highest standing in Bathurst, who gave only the most meagre details of John Trefusis' death, and beyond the bare fact that he had died suddenly, and that no will being forthcoming, his estates devolved on the next of kin, no information whatever was vouchsafed.

'Consistent to the last,' said the late John Trefusis' London solicitor, as he rubbed his eyeglasses. 'The man who could walk away from twenty thousand a-year, and three of the finest seats in England, would scarcely take the trouble to recollect he had nearly half a million to will to anybody he pleased.'

'What made him go off like that?' said Guy; 'did anyone ever find out?'

'From a mere child he had the most

extraordinary gipsy instincts,' said the old gentleman, 'and the greatest contempt for appearances and ceremony. Before he was five years old he would constantly be missing from his bed, and on being searched for, be found asleep under one of the trees in the park. He never seemed able to breathe save when out-of-doors, but when he grew up (having come into the title very young) he went into society, and did pretty much as other young men—only that he showed a reckless dare-devilry that rather frightened people from him—and no one would have been astonished to hear that he had married some beggar girl in a freak, or gone off to the gold-diggings; but when one day he actually disappeared, it made as great a sensation as if he had been one of the most correct noblemen living.'

Guy appeared to listen, but his thoughts were far away; besides, he had heard something very like this before.

"'One hour he was walking down St. James's Street with one of his acquaintances, the next, his place as host to Royalty at his own table, was empty, and from that moment till the one in which I received the letter you hold, not one trace of him has ever been discovered. At first he was supposed to have been murdered, and his death formed one of the burning topics of the day; but those who knew him best, believed he had gone to Australia, and some ten years ago a former servant of his came to us, and swore that he had seen his master over there in a bushranger's dress, and that the recognition being mutual, the Earl forbore to wound him, and rode away.'

'Would to God he were alive now, or had left an heir!' said the haggard young man as he rose, looking as little like a young heir newly come into his kingdom as may be imagined.

'Dear me,' said the old gentleman, per-

plexed, 'there seems to be a rooted objection to prosperity in the Trefusis family. One would have thought it pleasanter to be Lord Thor than a captain on half-pay, for you sold out, I believe, before you went to Australia.'

'I did,' said Guy, haughtily, 'and I wish with all my soul I were with my old regiment now, and without a shilling in the world save what I earned. Good morning.'

'They are all as mad as hatters,' said the old gentleman to himself as Guy went out; 'I should not wonder if that young man bolted one of these days—was ever such perversity known?'

Then he rang the bell for his confidential clerk, and set the first wheel going in the slow machinery that would presently place Guy in legal possession of the title and estates of his late cousin.

CHAPTER XIII.

O! see, for he gangs, an' see for he stands,
The wearie heir o' Linne;
O! see, for he stands on the cauld causey,
And nane ane bids him come in.

WHEN Guy accepted his duty towards Tishy, he did so without any intention of shirking his responsibilities, and on leaving his lawyer, walked straight to Grosvenor Square, and found her park-hack being led up and down outside the house, while a groom waited with another. Surely, he was not expected to ride that morning, Guy thought, looking down on his splashed boots, and not observing how some one was approaching at so equal a distance with himself from the house that held Tishy, as to make both men turn in

simultaneously at her door, and at the same moment lift their hand to opposite bells.

As it chanced, Guy rung the servants' bell and Bobbie the visitors', after which they looked at one another, and, wretched as he felt, Guy could have found it in his heart to burst out laughing, the situation was ridiculous. Bobbie wondered savagely if this was the other man's first visit—if so, Tishy was not lost yet,—and then he turned from his contemplation of the sky, to find that the door was open behind him, and to hear Guy say, 'Miss Trefusis?'

'Yes, my lord, in the morning room.'

'Take Miss Trefusis this card,' said Bobbie, curtly, as Guy passed in, 'and say that I am waiting to speak to her.'

The butler did not even look at the card in his hand; he had seen at the first glance that this was the lover who had to be kept out, and his voice was

the perfection of respect as he said, 'Miss Trefusis is not at home to anyone this morning, sir, except to Lord Thor.'

For a moment Bobbie hesitated, the door was open, the hall empty—save for the butler. He could see the distant doorway that had admitted Guy, now or never was the time to have it out with her, and so much the better in Guy's presence; but poor Bobbie had the instincts of a gentleman, and even desperate love and jealousy combined, could not force him to so far forget himself.

'You will say that I called?' he said, steadying his voice with a violent effort.

'I will, sir,' said the man; but even as he spoke, a distant door opened, and Tishy and Guy's voices approached.

Gently, with no appearance of knowing that Bobbie still lingered on the doorstep, Saunders inexorably closed it upon him, and when the soft click sounded close to his ear, Bobbie swore to himself that he

had been a fool not to push forward, and ask, and get his answer.

'Excuse me, sir,' said the butler, as Guy laid his hand on the lock to open it, 'someone is just leaving——'

'Stand back,' said Guy, haughtily; and with Tishy only a pace or two behind him, threw open the door, and the girl found herself face to face with Bobbie.

Now, did Guy do this purposely—did he hope that a sudden sight of this lover, whom he knew she preferred to himself, might bring her back to her better self, and so make happy four souls that now were such wretched ones?

Tishy drew a sharp breath, and went white as ashes at the sight of Bobbie; then, with so scarcely perceptible a pause that the butler observed none, she held out her hand to the young man.

'Ah, how do you do, Mr. Sands?' she said. 'I hope your father, and all are well at home? I believe you have not

met my cousin before;' and she carelessly introduced them, then stepped out and crossed the pavement to her mare.

Two footmen had come out, the grooms were waiting, Saunders stood on the step.

'It looks like rain,' she said as she patted the beautiful creature's back; 'will you put me up, Guy?' she added, and when seated, settled her habit to her satisfaction and gathered up the reins.

'Good-bye,' she said, including both young men in her parting salutation; 'remember, Guy, that we expect you to dinner,' then rode away, leaving the two standing side by side on the pavement.

Bobbie lifted his hat, and without a syllable turned on his heel. There was a hell raging in his heart, but he gave no sign as he walked quietly away, knowing that the worst that could befall him, had befallen.

'I never saw punishment given more neatly, or taken better in my life,' said

the butler (after an interview with his mistress) to the housekeeper. 'He loves the very ground she treads on—which the other one *don't*—but he'll never trouble her with a word of love again as long as she lives—not if she were stuffed with diamonds and rubies—or my name's not Timothy Saunders.'

Book V.

YUNTHA AND GUY.

CHAPTER I.

Mony a ane for him makes mean,
But nane sall ken whaur he is gane;
O'er his white banes when they are baro,
The wind sall blaw for evermair.

When Guy found Yuntha gone, and his locket shining in the sunlight, he thought she was only hiding from him as she had so often done before, and sat down with the beautiful city set like a jewel in its rich plains before him, his mind still bent to the problem that he had found it impossible to work out during his few short minutes of absence. He had put thought

back during these past days, and, while checking any expression of love with an iron hand, had given himself up to the joys of her companionship, the hourly delight of sharing with her the good fortune or accidents of their flight.

They had been to each other more as good comrades than lovers who shrank from, yet trembled on the verge of that passionate confession which must end, or enrich their happiness; but one of them knew that the moment must inevitably come when he would have to choose between love and duty, honour and dishonour, happiness and wretchedness, though already his decision was a foregone conclusion.

He was at heart a proud man, with stern notions of honour, and what he owed to the traditions of his family—his future, too, had claims upon him that he profoundly acknowledged, and more than all these, that other fetter which

had hitherto rested on him so lightly, now closed upon him with leaden weight, and would not be shaken off, save by the violence of an effort that must leave him vanquished in his own eyes, and smirched (however much for her sake) in those of the woman he loved.

Her self-control had matched his—both he and she were morally and physically well braced up against temptation, and could renounce without sign. Yet there had always been that electric throb of sympathy between them that made the sky clear if they were together, and dark if they were apart, that made beautiful the commonest duty if shared . . . Was it all over, the wild, fearless, wholesome life; those glorious nights, cradled in warm mother-earth, with the blue sky for canopy, and the rustling monotone of the night winds to lull them to slumber, knowing that morning would bring them once more together, each reading his beauty in the

other's eyes, and glorying in it, as if there were but one body and heart between them?

Yonder lay the city, before him stretched the existence of the civilised being, behind him the life of the savage. For the one lived in the fullest sense of the term, and the other merely existed, supporting his unfortunate situation by adventitious aids, in not one of which was to be found happiness, so that in dying, he clung as a forlorn hope to reaching that shore which imagination paints, but no living eye has seen.

He could understand now the apparent madness of John Trefusis, for 'To be a wanderer,' says De Guérin, 'is to fulfil the truest conditions of humanity,' and the wanderer's cousin felt this truth, without knowing that it had ever been expressed.

His soul revolted at the petty mill-round of so-called pleasure that lay before him; he knew it so well, and how it was

not worth one tithe of a true lover's kiss, or the fearless independence of a lip that owes no man anything, and bows only to his Maker.

He had duties at home—ay—but a man rarely dies without a better than he springing up to fill his shoes; and those tenants that he had never seen, those improvements that others knew how to carry out more efficaciously than he might, would be all the better for his non-appearance, and Tishy—well, Tishy would probably resign herself to circumstances, and marry well. Poor Tishy! Why had he never loved her, yet asked her to marry him?

A little idleness, and some pity, a little cold admiration of her beauty, with a great deal of liking for her unconventional ways, and honest, hard-working life—yet none of these had made them at one, and without knowing that the fault was hers, he had separated himself from her for some

months, hoping that absence would bring love.

No doubt she was sewing her wedding gown now, awaiting his return with the cheerfulness that had witnessed his departure, but which might be a little disturbed by the intelligence probably now on its road to her through Carruthers.

Had she ever loved him? Not once during his courtship of her had he stopped to ask himself the question.

He had been King Cophetua in the future, and she the beggar maid in the present; and it was more with the generous glow of one who showers alms, than the humble, waiting pride of the suppliant, that he had wooed and left her, certain of finding her dutiful and obedient on his return.

Perhaps she would cry a little on account of her family and herself when she heard the report of his death—for her family first, since she was a girl in whom

home ties were strong, and the acquaintance of a few weeks was not to be reckoned in value beside the associations of years.

Her independence of spirit had attracted him, it was so like his own; and the women of his world had so entirely failed to tempt or interest him, that a Devonshire girl easily accomplished what had appeared impossible, so that society experienced a sensation on hearing that the future Earl of Thor was engaged to a cousin whose father was 'passing poor' on a hundred and forty pounds a-year.

And he had offered to throw her over—to prove himself dead to conscience and duty—to give up a magnificent inheritance for the uncertain one that the sky and winds permitted—all this in a moment of madness, when by a decision unconsciously arrived at, he all along intended by one swift, fierce, wrench to free himself from his present thraldom, and face his duty like a man.

But insensibly this savage maiden had won him, so that he was no longer his own master—her purity, courage, truth, all that he had felt lacking in civilised women he found in her, nobly seconding the charms of body that had first fixed his gaze, and determined his pursuit of her.

In his past life he had been no Bayard, but he had also been no flirt. If Yuntha had not roused in him the spirit of resistance by her seeming coquetry, he might have gone on his way untempted, and died or lived, coldly faithful to Tishy to the end.

But if he had kissed and followed Yuntha as a coquette, he had found her none, and with his whole soul he honoured as well as passionately worshipped her, and even while just now he had sacrificed his integrity for her sake, he felt himself lowered in her eyes, and scarcely worthy of the love she had so coldly and proudly confessed.

But she loved him, and would bid him stay; yet the thought of the sacrifice he was making for her, cooled the fever-heat of his blood, and dimmed her beauty, as he gazed at the distant city, and asked himself if, indeed, he were a traitor to his better self in giving up honour, duty, and self-respect, all for the sake of love.

The morning brightened and grew, but still he sat there with eyes fixed, and deep in thought, hearkening less for the sound of a footstep behind him than bidding farewell to that life to which honour and duty plainly called him.

CHAPTER II.

Nae wonder, nae wonder, Gil Morrice
My lady lo'es thee weel;
For the whitest part o' my body
Is blacker than thy heel.

YUNTHA'S brief, intense gaze at the face in Guy's locket photographed on her memory an undying portrait, whose vivid colours remained unfaded to all time.

At sight of those pure carnations, and that red gold hair, a revulsion of feeling came over her, and she saw herself black as night beside the brilliant colouring that yet was so fine and delicate, and of which Guy's was a masculine copy.

The locket had seemed to burn her hand as she gazed, and she had dropped it, and fled without any conscious intention of

flight, but rather a longing to find herself alone, and able to think.

She had believed that the barrier between them was simply their difference of colour (and yet if he had not been blinded by love he must have guessed her secret), and had resolved that unless he would boldly acknowledge her in the light of day as a brown woman, whom he was proud to make his wife, she would root up her love for him, and go back to the tribe, to live or die as it willed.

She had been prouder, and more reticent in her love than he, and for this she thanked heaven as she went trembling and panting like a wounded creature to a tree, not three hundred yards away, to which she climbed, and hid herself, and whence she saw him return to the spot where he had left her.

She thought he took her absence very indifferently, as without a single glance around, he sat down, and gave himself up to thought.

Was he already repenting his words of five minutes ago? was he, as she had once tacitly felt, denying her the woman's privilege of refusing what he offered? So that if he stooped to bestow, she must gladly accept his gifts?

Her pride was greater than his, and even as she gazed yearningly at him, her mind unconsciously made itself up, and she saw him traversing the city beyond on his way to the Englishwoman, who was watching for him, and whom he must once have loved, and might love again.

The gulf between them had never seemed to her so wide as from between the eucalyptus boughs she looked at him, and shared in his struggle.

Pure love knows of no past, anticipates no future—it lives in the present alone, and Tishy's portrait was to Yuntha an illumination of Guy's past conduct, and a revelation of things unguessed at, that for a time stunned her beyond the power of

thought, and fixed her eyes in a purely mechanical gaze on that lonely figure in the foreground, which had moved neither hand nor foot since it had returned to find her gone.

Was he glad? Was he sorry? Why had he not sped breathless in pursuit of her, instead of sitting there waiting for her return?

Surely she had made herself cheap, or he would not so have taken her consent for granted; and here pride outstripped love, so that she contemplated his back with irritation, and felt that a few more moments' survey of it would make her descend and reach some retreat, where even love's ingenuity could not find her.

Jealousy (hitherto unknown to her) stung the girl sharply, but had not power to call forth one cry of pain. No doubt she was less beautiful than the woman whose blue eyes wore so honest a glance that none might wrong her willingly, and

surely she was no flirt, as he had implied, and might love him truly, howsoever he had changed to her, and Yuntha's spirit recoiled at the thought of stealing the Englishwoman's lover.

Brown women had better notions of honour than white men, and so he would learn when he should turn to find her gone . . . and Yuntha trembled less as she descended from her hiding-place than when she had climbed it, certain of immediate pursuit so soon as he discerned her to be missing.

But still he sat, immovable, nor saw the slender hands stretched out as in valediction towards him, heard not the faint foot-falls that receding gradually, and as though a heavy heart moved them, till they faded into silence, and were heard no more.

CHAPTER III.

Ye needna burst your gude white steed,
Wi' racing o'er the down,
Nae bird flies faster through the wood
Than she fled through the broom.

THE sun was high in the heavens when Trefusis pulled himself together, rose, looked around.

He had made his mind up; and he was hungry, and thought just then more of his twelve-o'clock dinner than Yuntha, who had no doubt prepared it with that grace which made of every meal a delightful surprise, and he and she the Adam and Eve who alone knew how to enjoy it. And afterwards, having told her of his sovereign will, he would—

Take her by the milk-white hand,
And by the grass-green sleeve,

and leading her to the city yonder, make her his wife as quickly as parson and the church permitted.

Now that the bitterness of the struggle was past, his whole soul went out to her, and he retraced the steps he had trodden with her that morning, gradually forgetting his hunger as she still hid herself from him, and refused to appear.

'Yuntha!' he cried, and the silence around seemed to find tongue, and echo his cry; but alas! he called on her half-an-hour too late, and not even love's voice could reach her where she sped like a hunted creature on a homeward path.

It is so easy to renounce the joys of which one knows nothing . . . and both he and she had been abstemious . . . sending away almost untasted the platter of love daily set before them, so that they hardly knew its flavour, and, perhaps, feared as much as longed for it. Each had held love back, but now it had burst the

dams, leapt the barriers, and by mere utterance swept all before it—and the man's pulses quickened as he went forward, and from mere abstinence of a sight of her, longed to see the exquisite shape in its familiar suit of green, waiting for him behind some tree.

But all at once it struck him, when he had wandered far in search of, but had not found her, that

Of her he had speir'd nae leave.

He had settled it all in that grizzling, bitter hour in which he had deliberately chosen his future; but gradually the chill conviction came home to him that he had left Yuntha out of his calculations, that in truth

Of her he had speir'd nae leave.

He had treated her as a passive agent; but perhaps she had been thinking as hard as he, and her notions of honour might be keener than his, and her love less.

Being a man, the bare thought of this indifference was sufficient to set him walking as with seven-league boots in pursuit of her, till at last, devoured with hunger and disappointment, he sat down to rest himself at a spot where they had breakfasted with the dawn, and a glimpse of Bathurst in the distance to charge their thoughts with the parting that was imminent.

Perhaps he had been harsh with her, and abrupt, knowing the greatness of the future that he gave up for her sake, and how little she yielded in comparison . . . and she had resented his taking all for granted, and resolved to keep him hungry, body and soul, for a sight of her.

In that keen pure air (for it was now the middle of October and the height of the Australian spring, when fierce summer heats came untimely, and alternated with the freshness of the season) hunger of all kinds fastened on a man's vitals swiftly,

yet Guy did not pause to practise either of the arts that she had taught him, and in which he had at last almost equalled her.

He could not eat without her, and she would know this, and come out of her hiding-place, and they would share the mid-day meal together, and sit down to it side by side.

Sometimes their appetites had languished a little from love, but his had always revived first, and most assuredly he did not love her less because she was a delicious cook, and pleased his taste with every morsel she set before him.

With a green bough upon her slender arm, and spear in hand, she would go stealing against the wind to the water-hole where the kangaroo came to drink, and despatch him with a single thrust; fastening the feathers and skin of a hawk to a long stick and uttering the piercing cry of the hawk, she would startle the wallaby, and spear him before he could reach the

nearest bush. By the faint scratch of a claw on the bark of a tree she knew the opossum to be within, and climbed and dragged him from his hole before he knew of her approach; or holding a piece of fish in her hand, and lying as if asleep would entice a crow, and by a sudden movement of the wrist catch it; would net and noose ducks, breathing through a reed as she swam under water towards a flock; and with her strong fishing lines, made of any raw material within reach, land new and delicate kinds of fish that the Englishman preferred to any he had ever tasted in his own country.

She tracked the bee to its nest, and stole its honey, gathered manna, and made sweet drinks of the flowers of the honeysuckle, pounded the seeds of the nardoo, and mingling other seeds with them, made the flour thus formed into cakes that she served hot to him with breakfast.

And all these arts she had taught him—

yet not one of them, he swore to himself, would he exercise till he had found her.

If she had forsaken him (and gradually a chill dread was beginning to fill him) he would stay the rest of that day, and the night, fasting, and perhaps by morning she would have repented, and would come to him.

Had he held her too cheap? were her notions of honour sterner than his own? and was a brown woman too proud to steal a lover from her white sister?

He came at last to the tree beneath which he had breakfasted with her that morning, and throwing himself down on the grass, gave himself up to thought.

The day waxed and waned, evening drew near, and the forest voices began to give tongue, but still the tattered Englishman sat erect and grim, his arms folded tightly across his breast, his ears strained to catch each lightest footfall; but when night fell, and the waning moonlight trem-

bled on the waters before him, his head sank against the tree behind him, and he fell asleep.

* * * *

When the night was greying towards dawn, a shadow stole from behind a flowering wattle, and standing a little apart, gazed down yearningly upon the sleeping man.

He had grown haggard in a day, and looked cold and weary, so that she longed for one of the opossum rugs that both he and she had abandoned that morning without a thought.

All day she had hovered near him, yet dropped no clue to her presence — had stealthily driven game towards him, but seen how he lifted no hand to slay it, and fasting herself, felt each hunger-pang doubled at thought of his, till for pure pity's sake she had almost snared, and brought food to his side while he slept.

But she dared not reveal her presence,

and to-morrow he would wake refreshed, and turn back to the city, and in time he would forget her, and honour her more deeply that she had stood fast against him than if she had yielded.

But the homeward path looked cold to her, and lonely . . . and probably death waited for her at her journey's end, for if Djarrah were not at the camp there would be none to plead for her, and Monana would be the first to curse, and stone her.

Billy might be dead, or beyond her reach, and the old existence seemed cold and desolate to the girl as she gazed at Guy and thought of how he had offered to give up home and future for her sake, and yet she could not give up such a little thing as he asked in return.

Was not his happiness first, and that of the Englishwoman second? If he chose to mourn by her as dead, should Yuntha thrust away from her own lips the cup of which she could scarcely be said to rob the other?

If her heart had hardened to him that morning when he took her absence so indifferently, it had softened when pale and wild he had sought her along the track by which they had passed that day, being more than once so close to her, that she had trembled with fear of being discovered by him.

But now she might look her fill, and he would not know it. She might carry away with her as companion portrait to his English sweetheart the bright, brave features of this white man who had loved her to the extent of even giving up honour for her sake. And as she stooped above him, one burning tear fell heavily on his cheek, and was felt by him even through his slumbers, so that even before she knew it had escaped her, he had sprung up and snatched her in his arms.

CHAPTER IV.

Ye'll pu' the blossom frae aff the broom,
Strew't at his head and feet,
And aye the thicker that ye strew,
The sonder he will sleep.

For a moment Yuntha rested as still as though she were a willing captive, then as his eager lips sought hers, she dropped her head on his shoulder, and so avoiding him, strove to escape.

Her heart thrilled to his—her slender shape longed to repose itself on his strength, even as she struggled away from him, and she dared not look up to meet his eyes, his lips, or her courage would leave her, and she must purchase happiness at the price of honour, and for ever sink both his self-

respect and her own in a single moment of weakness.

'You must not kiss me,' she said almost in a whisper; and in the spent voice he found no coquetry of love, but the weakness that chivalry respects, and the hot blood in him grew calmer, though his arms abated no jot of their hold, as at last she looked up, and the two pairs of blue eyes met.

'Why did you run away, Yuntha?' he said, sternly.

'And you looked so cold and hungry,' she said, inconsequently enough. 'I ought to have gone back and told you, and so saved you such a long dance after me; but I will tell you now, and cook your supper; and if I cannot find the opossum rugs we left behind I will strew some leaves over you that will keep you warm, and by morning you will start for Bathurst once more, and seek a ship.'

'A ship?' he said, as he looked down a

little coldly into the wide blue eyes that looked at him through such bitter, unshed tears. 'And is that your bargain, Yuntha, that I take you back with me to England?'

He felt the instant recoil in her body as sharply as if she had struck him, and though he still held her, she felt the difference, as she said,—

'You will go alone. I thought the locket would explain that. We savages do not steal other women's lovers, or ask the men we love to forfeit honour for our sakes.'

He let her go then, and stood apart.

She had brought the dishonour he meditated more keenly home to him than his midnight searchings, his daylight thoughts, had power to do, and he felt less the girl's master than her pupil, as they faced each other in the moonlight.

He answered her almost like an automaton, as she said,—

'Did she love you?'

'I never asked her,' he replied.

'And did she love you?' There was a break here in Yuntha's voice that did her honour, for had she not found herself frightful beside Tishy's pictured charms?

'I don't know.'

'And is she as rosy and white as in her portrait?' said Yuntha, wistfully.

'She is worse,' said Guy, with an emphasis that bordered on disgust.

The pale beauty of the girl before him, the soft gloom of her brown locks, and the dark, deep blue of her lovely eyes, had never seemed to him so alluring as, with one slender hand pressed against her heart, she looked at, and defied him. The civilised man sometimes suffers under supreme anguish with a fortitude that he deems heroic, but the savage endures ten-fold pangs without realising that he is heroic at all—and Yuntha felt no heroism as she said,—

'Is she a good woman? Is there some

one who would have been kind to her if you had died?'

'She is poor,' he said, brusquely, forced into truth by her glance; 'and probably she will mourn my loss more than if she were rich.'

'And are you a poor man?' said Yuntha; 'or are you rich?'

'I am bitterly poor,' he said, standing faint and haggard before her, and with his voice sunk low from fasting; 'but there is a chance upon which hangs a future, and then there will be hundreds of lives depending on me, and the woman whose portrait you have seen knows it, and values me accordingly.'

'You mean,' she said, slowly, 'that you will be powerful some day—that your good or bad conduct will determine the course of many lives.'

'How do you know all this?' he cried; 'it must be mere guess work, for you cannot *know*.'

'Billy has taught me,' she said; 'he used to teach me my duty towards my neighbour and myself.'

'And are you doing your duty by me?' he said, his eyes angry and cold as he looked at her.

How lonely it was . . . how still . . . how utterly alone they were in this unbeaten track of the forest that even the murmur of the river could not reach; yet Yuntha felt no fear as she said,—

'To love is to do one's duty, and not think of self; and your honour is more than you.'

'So you love me well enough to send me away from you for ever,' he said, in a strained, harsh voice; 'but I do not love you so well—and more than that, against your will, my honour, everything—I mean to keep you.'

If she trembled before the warning note in his voice, the first audible presage of the storm of passion that had been rising in

him all day, she gave no sign, as she said, 'The gift that goes unwillingly is only gratefully received by a dishonest man or a coward, and you are neither;' but even while her high words and pure voice rang out, he hardened his heart against their truth, and by the decision that he had falteringly come to that day, swore to live or die.

'You love me!' he said, doggedly; 'you were not ashamed to tell me so this morning in sight of Bathurst, and to-night you shall not deny it.'

Their eyes met like foes who loved and hated in a breath, across the narrow strip of green that lay between them, but it was as foe rather than lover, that Yuntha cried, 'I judged you as one of my own tribe, and if you loved one woman, why did you trouble yourself about another? I did not think of Billy and his teaching. . . . I looked at your face, and believed you.'

'Then look at me now,' he said, coming

a step nearer to her; 'love is first, duty second. Your renunciation of me will make no living being as happy as your kiss would make me to-night.'

'For to-night,' she said, in her sad voice; 'but for to-morrow? You do not know what it is to live here in the loneliness, the stillness. . . . Sooner or later you hear the voice of God . . . and how could you bear to hear or answer it, if you had lost all for a single soul, and the others were crying out to you for help!

'We should grow weary,' she went on, as he stood with bowed head before her, 'and come to hate one another—and I should cling to the savage life, and you would long for the civilised one. I said good-bye to you this morning with the locket I laid on the ground; and I am only here to-night because I knew you had left your opossum rug behind, and I feared you would be cold and hungry.'

'So I am,' he said, harshly, for he was

now getting dangerously out of patience; 'and pray, madam, do you consider a man's mental ills as invisible beside his bodily ones?'

The shaft of cruelty that is in all true love towards what it loves, struck on her heart, and made her wince under his pain; but as a wounded savage draws the arrow straight *through* his body, instead of withdrawing it, she endured this insult without wincing, and looked coldly indifferent as she said,—

'There are worse ills to be endured than hunger—that can be satisfied at any odd minute, but honour must be to the moment, or not at all.'

He knew that she was only fencing with him; and here the dangerous freemasonry of hearts that understood each other defied all moral or intellectual calculation, and while bandying useless words, demanded a plain 'Yes' or 'No,' and while eluding, was bent on obtaining it.

I don't know if chivalry is stronger than real love. . . . God made hearts, and man made laws, and sometimes God is stronger than the law . . . and when the burning breath of passion kindles two souls, chivalry is usually thrown off with the gloves and other trappings that disguise the true lover, and he stands forth alone, as Heaven and his own soul made him.

Guy suddenly snatched the supple figure, and bent it like a reed in his strong grasp. It was a boy's shape in its strength and lissomeness, but he held her like a child, and looked down with a man's exultant joy on the one thing on earth that he coveted, and found within his power.

Her arms hung to her sides; he could not force her to lift them to his neck, and even as her heart beat against his, he knew that she denied him, that, though he could bend her body, he could not break her will, and that what he would have sacrificed his whole future to win, was as much out of

his reach as though he had sought for her for ever, but never found her.

Perhaps a savage grapples with human passions as naturally as with nature's mysteries, and fears neither; for there was no fear in Yuntha's eyes as she looked up at her lover, and renounced, while she so madly loved him.

He had never coveted her so fiercely, longed for her so passionately, as now, when her honour proved stronger than his own, and would not abate one jot of the sacrifice she made on his behalf.

'Kiss me, Yuntha!' he said, hoarsely; 'if you have ever loved me, kiss me once.'

'I cannot,' she said; and her lips went pale, and the faint colour died out of her cheeks—'and I cannot breathe in your arms.'

And then he half loosed his hold, but would not let her go quite, lest she should escape him.

'Yuntha,' he said, 'we love one another,

and who shall come between us? By this time my people believe me dead—and you gave up everything for my sake, so that to be my wife is only one step farther.'

'If you had told me at first what you told me to-day,' said the girl, with her head bowed away from him, 'I would have been your sister—I would have done all for you that I have done, but I would not have loved you as I love you to-day.'

'And I,' he said, doggedly, 'swore to win you in spite of Djarrah.'

'As your wife?' said Yuntha, coldly.

'Wife or no wife,' he cried, over-tasked beyond his strength, 'I have got you safe, and I will keep you. To-night I will hold you safe in my arms—to-morrow I will take you to the city yonder, and marry you with or without your will.'

Worn with fasting and love, the threatened bride and bridegroom of the morrow looked at one another with spirits that hardened in opposition. . . . There was

too much of bitter and reproach in their love to make it lovely, and abruptly he set her down, and for a moment covered his eyes.

When he dashed his hand away, the night was empty—she was gone.

Then madness seized him, and he ran like one out of his senses hither and thither, calling upon her by name, and imploring her to come back; but though yet within his reach, she was deaf to his cries, and retreated farther and yet farther from them, so that when daylight broke, he doubted no longer, but knew himself forsaken.

Then he turned his face to the city, and swore aloud that he would go home to redeem his honour, but that he would return to claim Yuntha and her love.

CHAPTER V.

Oh! wherefore need I busk my head?
Or wherefore should I kaime my hair?
For my good lord has me forsook,
And says he'll never love me mair.

A PAIR of blue eyes watched from afar the white sails set that should convey Guy to his English love, and only when they had faded from the horizon did Yuntha bow her head and weep those agonised tears that had scorched her eyeballs for the past two days.

But in point of fact Guy was not in the ship she had seen sail away. He had scarcely set foot in Bathurst when he was struck down with an attack of illness that kept him in his bed over a week, so that when he rose he found he had missed two

mails, and was only just in time for the third. His eagerness to return made him feverish to depart, so that he hardly cast one backward look at the beautiful city.

Yuntha had drawn a bee-line to Bathurst, and followed it, and the Englishman had not guessed half the difficulties and dangers of the path, as he accompanied her with the thoughtless gaiety of a schoolboy; but now, as she slowly retraced her steps, she came on land-marks of love that wrung her soul, though it might be only a heap of ashes by which they had dined, or the body of a snake that she had seized before it had time to strike him.

He had come like one with a charmed life through a thousand dangers, scarcely recognising the skill and courage of the girl who had been his guide and companion, and she wept silently as she went from point to point where they had rested, and weary and fasting came at nightfall to a glen whose rocky sides were clad with

cypresses that were not even stirred by the wind that swept the forest trees above, so that in the awful solitude below that the moonbeams scarcely pierced, was the silence, the desolation of a grave.

Yet here he had slumbered soundly, against yonder tree his head had rested, while alert and wakeful she had watched and guarded him; then, when safety came with daylight, snatched some brief repose, and was abroad, and snaring his breakfast before he was well awake.

She had cooked nothing for herself during the past two days, only plucking a berry here and there to keep life in her, for her spirit abhorred the cowardice of suicide, and while with her English lover she had cast love and life behind her, she would not shrink from meeting the death that she knew faced her at her journey's end.

The night was chill—the air pierced her, as she leant her brow to the tree and sank

beside it . . . . last night she had found the bondage of his arms hateful, to-night she shivered at the thought of how far away from her was such violence of love, now.

There was an awful loneliness, a terrible desolation, in spite of its beauty, about the scene, and her eyes, aching from want of rest, gazed on it without love . . . already the wild forest life was proving insufficient to her, and the voices that so long had taught her, were falling on cold and unheeding ears.

Gradually her head drooped, and the clasp of the slender hands slackened—a moonbeam trembled upon her exquisite lips, and played here and there as though in pity on the tired limbs, and faded green of the suit that so scantily clothed her, but none who gazed on might pity her, for she was happy, and following her true love's ship, had found and kissed him mouth and cheek with all her soul.

Though awful in its immobility and silence from above, the glen was yet full of secret, subtle noises that presently seemed to take shape in the on-coming, halting step of a human being. Carelessly and slowly it passed from midnight shade of spreading tree to moonbeam-touched snatches of grass, until it smote on Yuntha's sleeping senses, and instantly roused her.

She sprang up quivering and panting. She had been face to face with her lover in the spirit a second ago—was she face to face in the flesh with him now? Yet she shrank back, instead of going forward, and hid her eyes as she felt steps approach her.

Then as they paused, she dared to look up, and a moonbeam being full upon her while he was yet in shadow, she stretched out her hands and said, 'You have come back?'

She could hardly see him where he stood, but heard a sharp, choked cry of

'Wanda!' then felt her heart and limbs turn to ice as a man came near, peered into her face, then stood for a second or two frozen, and incapable of speech as herself. He took her for a ghost, a conjured up hallucination born of his excited state, and unstrung thoughts . . . she was there to mock him, to curse him in his hour of triumph, but stricken though he was, courage reached his hand to the phantom, and gripped it fast, while eagerly he gazed down at the girl, with the strained look that the living may turn upon the dead.

But even while she stood shrinking but fearless before him, the man knew that he was not dreaming, and that before him stood his own child.

'What is your name?' he said.

'Yuntha.'

He remembered it all so well . . . the name so carelessly chosen for the babe that its mother had never loved or valued, though it was white as its father, and with

an inherited pride of bearing that confused her . . . for the man Wanda had loved was never any other to her than the handsome gold-digger who had rescued her from a loveless marriage, and whom she had passionately worshipped till she had found that her love wearied and chained him, her own hand loosing the fetters before he had time to realise how bitterly they galled him.

'You have left the aborigines?' he said.

'I am returning to them now,' she said, feeling compelled even against her will to reply to him.

'Where have you been?' he said next.

'An Englishman came by accident to the camp. I assisted him to escape, and brought him to Bathurst. His ship has sailed.'

'Who taught you English?' said the stranger, abruptly.

'Billy,' she said, and for the first time coloured and looked down.

'He told you that you had a white father?'

'Yes.'

'That he deserted you?'

'No.'

'You love this Englishman?'

No answer.

'And he loves you?'

'Yes.'

'His name?'

'I don't know it.'

'He is coming back?'

'No.'

'They will kill you on your return to the camp?'

'Probably.'

'Your father's own child,' he muttered below his breath; then said aloud, 'You have wished to know something of your father?'

'No, he was cruel and selfish. But my mother loved him.'

'Ay, she did!' he said in a voice that

softened suddenly, 'and for her sake his daughter should not hate him.'

As he loosed his hold of her, a light broke in on Yuntha's mind—some instinct hitherto unknown stirred her heart, and drew her to where he stood apart, hating himself for the weakness that had overcome him.

'Father!' she said. And why is a woman's voice so much sweeter when she says 'Father' than when son calls on sire, or daughter on mother?

Her voice touched his heart. It had a ring of Wanda's; but when her timid hand approached his breast, and was instantly withdrawn, he said to himself bitterly that she had been too well taught to feel for him anything but detestation.

'Hark!' she said in a whisper, and lifting her hand, stood like a living creature turned into a statue, each muscle and sinew strained to the keenest tension of listening, then suddenly seized his hand,

and drew him into the shadow of the nearest tree.

'They are after *me*,' she said in his ear, and Cucumber Jack remembered how he had saved her mother once from pursuit—as he would save her daughter now.

He had heard nothing, for, with all his bush training, his ears were less delicate than hers, but mechanically his hand went to his belt, and with a six-chambered revolver in either hand he stood as still as Yuntha, and listened.

In another moment light footsteps that came on quickly and carelessly, approached. Evidently no opposition was expected, and the scout who had discovered Yuntha sleeping under the tree had not even hurried himself to call the others to seize so unsuspecting a prey.

About half-a-dozen shapes glided together into the light of the moonbeams, one of them being a woman.

The savages advanced at once towards

the shadow of the tree; but when within some half-dozen paces of father and daughter, the sharp ping of a bullet rang out, and the foremost savage leaped high in the air, and without a cry or groan fell dead at Cucumber Jack's feet.

Even from Monana's lips no sound issued, but retreating footsteps told that the savages were conferring, and in a few seconds a shower of spears hurled from every quarter struck the tree behind which the man and girl had now retreated.

He had thrust a third revolver into her hand, saying briefly, 'for yourself, in case you fall into their hands.'

Behind them was the cypress-covered wall of rock, to the right and left of them a space that was black as ink, beyond were rays of moonlight that touched the outer edges of the smaller trees, but gave no hint of what was hidden within.

Utter silence prevailed — the savages might have stolen away, or advanced to

the very side of them; but after a minute or so of uncertainty, Cucumber Jack coolly shifted one of his revolvers to his belt, and striking a match on the other, extinguished it as suddenly, and tossed Yuntha behind him. To right and left dark forms were approaching, but as he fired low and simultaneously, with either hand, there followed the sound of headlong falls, and stifled groans, then heavy steps receding as of those who carried burthens, then a dead silence in which Cucumber Jack struck another match, and found the coast perfectly clear.

Yuntha had neither spoken nor blenched from the beginning — she had never felt the curse, and the glory of her white blood as keenly as then, when all her soul was with her father, but all her sympathies with the aborigines.

For perhaps half-an-hour the father and daughter watched, without any touch of hand or word out of the darkness, then

he put his hand on her shoulder and spoke.

'Come with me,' he said; and together they left the darkness, and emerged into the pale moonlight beyond.

He had always been too careless of danger to his own life to guard against it, but when his quick eye saw a movement in a clump of mulga that they were passing, a new sensation of the value of it passed like lightning through him, and even while he received deep in his breast the barb that was intended for Yuntha, tore it forth with a fierce impulse of prayer that it might not have brought him death.

'Monana!' he said, looking down at the convulsed heap of humanity exhausted by its murderous effort.

But till he spoke, the old Maori woman believed that she had revenged her Djarrah, her darling—that she had condemned to hideous agonies the girl who had been the cause of all his sufferings, and that now

she might rest awhile and gather up her strength to set out once more in search of him . . . . but at the sound of that almost forgotten voice she staggered up, glared at him, then tore the green leaves away from Yuntha's breast. It was pure as snow, and without a wound—Monana could have struck her nails into it for loathing of its colour, but Cucumber Jack caught her hands and pointed to his shoulder.

'It is here,' he said, grimly; then took his daughter's hand in his, and disappeared with her into the darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

O sweetest sweet, and fairest fair,
Of truth and worth beyond compare,
Thou art the causer of my care
Since first I lovèd thee!

JOHN TREFUSIS had been close to his hut when he chanced upon Yuntha in the glen that led to it; but even her trained senses could not have enabled her to establish a single landmark by which to guide herself out of the retreat to which he led her.

Through shadow and moonlight he had stepped lightly as she, and when he had unlocked a door and opened it, he struck a light that showed an interior different to anything she had ever seen before.

But she turned from it to where he stood, kindling a lamp, and putting her hand to the scarlet flannel shirt on which no deeper scarlet showed, said with trembling lips, 'The barb was poisoned. . . . . You will scarcely feel its bite yet—but it kills.'

He set the lamp down, and turned to look at her.

'You are sorry?' he said.

It was Wanda fused into his own image who stood before him—here he saw the dead before him—here he saw the dead alive, and the living in every trick of feature and carriage produced, and, greater puzzle of all, she was almost as white as an Englishwoman, while until the last few weeks he had at intervals beheld her brown as a berry, and following the avocations and daily life of a savage as one who profoundly loved them.

Perhaps if she had not known that death was dealing with him, her answer might

have been different; as it was she went close to him and took his hand.

It was long and supple—the hand of the aborigine and the hunter far more than that of an Englishman—and she thought for a second of Guy, who could never insert more than two fingers in the shield that she had fashioned for him on the same scale that she had made Djarrah's.

'My mother loved you,' she said, 'and I would have loved you too if you had let me, but I will love you now, and tend you till you die.'

'So I must die,' he said, harshly, as one who wakens to the value of something he had long despised, then added in the same breath, 'so be it; and now we will eat, for I have been fasting since noon.'

'I will go out and snare something,' said Yuntha, and felt for the simple weapons that she had unloosed from her side when she lay down shivering and wretched to her slumber.

'You will find all that you want here,' said her father; and the girl turned towards the cupboard that he had unlocked, and now threw open.

She had never seen or imagined anything like it before, but in an instant recognised it as housekeeping reduced to the minimum of toil and care, and, almost forgetting her father's case in zeal for his comfort, drew out biscuit, smoked tongue, but looked askance at the tea, sugar, and coffee that confronted her.

The lamp, too, confused her as she turned. How had a man caught the power of fixing and subduing light like that, when her own people had only the flare of torches at the mercy of every wind?

And yonder fire that she had kindled was no pile of sticks, whose smoke must escape through an opening in the middle of the wharré, but a slow-gathering flame that licked the resinous logs, and threw

out a cheerful light and odour, but little heat.

She looked around, even with bread and meat for the wounded man in her hands; she must look, the better to understand him.

The walls were strong, and of some material unknown, so completely were they hung with rich-coloured stuffs, save where three windows opened, bare and bleak, to the moonbeams.

A table, littered with books, and with a rude armchair beside it, stood on one side of the fireplace; above it a perfect armoury of weapons hung — some rusty and out of gear, others fresh as though recently used, and but just restored to their place.

It was curious to note how the civilised weapons (with the exception of the revolvers) had fallen into desuetude, while those of the aborigines were well worn, and shabby from constant use.

Yuntha's quick eye noted each sign of sympathy with the life with which she was familiar, and setting down the food, she ran to him, and kissed his hand.

It was cold already, for death was in his veins, but the tears she left on it were warm as Wanda's lips had been, and for a moment the man's cool, hard nature melted, and he partly realised all that he had lost in repudiating his child.

'Why do you do that?' he said, abruptly. 'When your mother died I left you to starve—it was only through an accident you were saved—and I killed the man who saved you.'

'It is one of our customs to let the child die with its mother,' said Yuntha, thinking only of how she could soothe him, 'and you could not have taken me with you.'

'What do you know of my life?' he said, turning on her swiftly.

He found tears in the blue eyes so

like his own, and then he laughed aloud, thinking of how little concern his past was to anybody now.

'Sit down,' he said, and led her to the first chair she had ever adorned, then, with a gesture that commanded obedience, himself arranged food on the table, and having filled the kettle, sat down to watch it.

Yuntha's eyes never left his face—the time was so short in which she might learn his features, catch the tone of his voice, and snatch some idea of the character of the man whom she called father.

Time had not sown a single grey hair in the bright gold of John Trefusis' locks, but his features showed signs of exposure to all weathers, and to perils of every kind, while the lofty, muscular figure, that had not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon it, was slightly stooped as though through long-continued illness, or the self-neglectful habits of the bush.

Yet in this carelessly dressed man in his

red flannel shirt and 'crackers,' the girl unconsciously recognised an individuality, a distinction, that even Guy lacked, and with that sense of fitness born in the savage, she felt him to be out of place with his surroundings. He watched the kettle, and she him, for some minutes; then he looked up and said, 'You were ashamed of being white, so stained your skin to the colour of the savages who adopted you?'

'Yes,' she said, colouring and looking down.

'You preferred to go through life as a savage to being a white woman?'

'Yes,' she said again. 'When I grew old enough to choose for myself, and knew the deceit Monana had practised about my skin, I deliberately continued it, for I wished to live and die among the savages.'

'And you wish it still?' he said, looking keenly at her.

'I love them,' she said, then (for even a savage has a limit to endurance of

hunger, misery, and fatigue) slipped from her chair, and lay at his feet.

He picked her up and laid her on the bed that stood next the wall, and making no effort to restore her, stood looking down on the girl, his features settling into harder and grimmer lines as the conflict in him rose, and beyond her loomed and grew large the image of his old friend and antagonist—Sam.

Surely, he thought, the delirium that was one of the features of his approaching death had come too early, as across the girl's body his eyes seemed to meet the reproachful ones of Sam—faithful as of old, but pleading dumbly, and with all the strength of his honest soul, for his 'sweetheart.' No reproach, no hatred showed in Sam's gentle glance, as kindly he looked at his old friend as when the two had been 'partners' in other things than gold dust.

Then the heart of the man hardened,

and the other's face faded—why had Sam come between him and his—followed him, spied on him, possessed himself of his secret life, and finally robbed him?

He and Sam had been playing a game of euchre for nearly eighteen years, and that very day he had won!

The documents for which Sam had died, and for the safe keeping of which Triangular Bob made shift to live these fifteen years in the bush, were at last his own, but how they were come by, and how much he had braved to obtain them, would fill a volume, and may not be recounted here.

His sombre gaze never left the girl's face. He stood like a man hewn out of stone, yet in his brain gigantic possibilities and a splendid destiny trembled and wavered in the balance.

He had left her to die once, and Sam had saved her; but he knew that if he left her now at the mercy of her tribe,

neither Triangular Bob nor any other could save her from a miserable death. His heir! What of him? He had been a bright-faced, sunny-haired boy at his mother's knee, when John Trefusis turned loathing from the hypocrisy and immorality of London life, and escaped to the pure air, the boundless freedom of the new world.

That boy must be a young man now, and bred up, no doubt, to his future estate. Well, it would be hard on the poor beggar, if—here the kettle boiled over, and John Trefusis went straight to it, made the tea, then came back to the girl, whose swoon seemed to have merged itself into a slumber, so peaceful and quiet she lay.

That hallucination of his about Sam still remained—if ever approaching death gave a man clearer vision of things unknown that in life he had not even guessed at, that man was John Trefusis to-night.

Sam's eyes suggested to him his duty . . . Duty! What was it? He had

followed inclination from his birth, with no inner sense to waken him to his responsibilities, or friend to point them out to him. He had regarded life as a thing to be enjoyed, not sacrificed to other human beings who should look out for themselves; but now, for the first time, it occurred to him that there might be men whose lives were not their own to live, but the property of those to whom they were stewards.

What manner of man was this young heir who would succeed the overseers, and deputy-masters of the lord who had absented himself these twenty years, with no more care for his dependents, than if they had been a flock of sheep that any menial hand might feed or fleece at will?

There had scarcely ever been known a Trefusis who had 'home-keeping wits;' yet, stay, there was one—a clergyman, who dwelt on the edge of a lonely moor in Devon, whose long family (was there ever such a hindrance to progress as long

families?) had rooted him firmly into the soil to which chance blew him.

This heir of his might have roving blood in his veins, too; but gratify it less simply than the man who stepped out naked from his trappings, and with not an ounce of gold in his pocket, or a weapon save his right arm, struck out for the diggings in search of work.

On the road Sam had found him, or he Sam—what could there have been in common with the working man and the aristocrat, that even in dying they should be so inextricably mixed?

John Trefusis scanned the features before him with the coolness of a practised man of the world and the acute perceptions of the savage. She had proved her courage, and though she might have a lover, her lips spoke purity, while the shape of the low, wide brow promised power.

As a savage she would bring her clear

gaze to bear on a hundred matters that the cobwebbed eyes of civilised folks saw but dimly. She would let sunlight in, and air, and space—if there could be air and space out of Australia. But there was this fellow that she had saved, and of course loved—who was he, and what influence might he not have over her?

Sometimes a sublimely vulgar or rich Dick or Harry came out here, bent on kangaroo-hunting, or shooting the black brethren that he classed with apes; or the girl might have fallen in with some out-at-elbows, well-born younger son who having started for the gold-fields a dozen years too late, was making his way homewards with not much chance of more than a lean fowl being killed in honour of his return. But if this girl appeared in her own proper state 'over there' (a remote spot in the world's landscape), the man would probably be her hanger-on immediately, and since it was the fashion of

savage women to be faithful, no doubt she would worship, and invest him with full authority to manage or mismanage the estates as he pleased.

Strange, but John Trefusis had not since his early boyhood taken that comprehensive sweep of gaze at castle and garden, wood and meadow, that he took now. They had been inadequate to his wants; but might they not prove adequate to the wants of two people who preferred love before liberty? No; the other would be best—the heir bred up to some notion of his duties—this one would die of transplantation to other soil. Had he not, unsuspected, a hundred times watched her happy and joyous as she pursued the avocations, and shared in the pleasures, of the tribe? She had seemed to belong to it body and soul, and the colour of her skin was so exactly like what her mother's had been, that at last he had half come to believe it natural, and not intending to

own her, troubled himself very little about the matter. Neither had he concerned himself with Billy, whose disguise he had long ago pierced, but the Triangular One was another matter, and could not complain of any lack of Cucumber Jack's attention during the last fifteen years.

And to-night John Trefusis knew that he had won his game, that he was dying, and that for the second time in his life he had to choose between providing for, or deserting, his child.

He turned from her impatiently, and in the same moment saw the door that faced him move gently, as though stirred by the wind.

Had his madness gone a step further, and was *Sam* on the threshold — that poor fool who had misunderstood him all through, and done more harm than he knew of by his blundering interference? Mechanically he drew his revolver, and stood still, watching.

Presently a hand appeared in the aperture, and on John Trefusis striding to the door, he found Monana crouching on the threshold.

'Have you come to bury me?' he said, drily; 'my daughter will do that.'

'So you acknowledge her?' said Monana, fiercely.

'Perhaps,' he said; 'and do you acknowledge the attack on Misogamy Camp, in which a man was killed, for whose death I got the credit?'

'I'd have gone through fire and water to steal the child,' said Monana, sullenly. 'Those rough fellows meant well enough, but how could they keep her from breaking her heart over a white man, as her mother did before her?'

'Her mother died happy,' said John Trefusis, coldly.

'Happy?' said Monana, bitterly. 'Perhaps so;—but do you know what she died of?'

'No,' he said, 'but it was an illness that ——'

'She died of *poison!*' shrieked Monana, 'administered by herself for a very old complaint.'

'What was that?' said Cucumber Jack.

'That which afflicts a woman who has played her heart against a fickle man's dummy,' said Monana. 'She wearied you, and knew it—so she died.'

'So you found out her hiding-place?' said John Trefusis, thinking partly of Wanda, and partly of a certain inscription he had made in a moment of madness.

'Ay,' said Monana, sullenly; 'but it was too late; she had been forty-eight hours dead. I unearthed the poor cold body, and buried it again; then, seeing signs of a child's presence, searched for it, but it was gone.'

'But you found it,' said John Trefusis, coolly, 'and saved me a lot of trouble.'

'There's more ahead,' said Monana,

gloomily; 'for she has fallen in love with the Englishman; read this,' and she produced from some hidden receptacle a letter that she thrust into his hand.

It was addressed to 'Guy Trefusis, Esq.,' care of some bankers in Sydney, and Cucumber Jack looked at the superscription for some seconds before he turned the envelope round and opened it.

'B— House, Salop.'

'Dear Guy,' it ran, 'how are you, and have you found any traces yet of your cousin, John Trefusis? When not chasing the nimble kangaroo, I advise you to fish about in the streams for John's body. I am told the savages are partial to burying their big pots in the beds of their rivers. Very nice for the fishes, but bad for your chances of proving yourself Lord Thor. If you find anything coloured to suit your fancy, I advise you to bring her home; for, labelled "eligible *parti*," as you are, no decent woman here is likely to look at you.

By the way, I hear of some little entanglement of yours in the country—quite right of you to cut and run—the devil himself is no match for a dairymaid in a lane. Adieu, old chap. When you get back you will probably find me in Holloway Gaol—committed for contempt of court—for I've had seven writs and three summonses served on me since Monday.—Yours ever,

'ALGY S.

'P.S.—I'm down here with the "guv." for a few days. He is as hard up as I am, *but more respectable.*'

'So he is to be a lord, and that's why she deserted my Djarrah,' said the old woman, fiercely, as John Trefusis folded up the letter. 'Her mother was bad enough to put up with a gold digger, but her daughter's worse—she must fall in love with a lord.'

'And what are lords like?' said Cucumber Jack, sitting down on a stool opposite the old woman.

'They live idle, dissolute lives on other men's brains and bodies,' said Monana, bitterly. 'It is a cruel, unnatural life you English live, and some day you will see that savages have better notions of using their breath than you.'

'No doubt,' said Cucumber Jack. 'And pray did your granddaughter know the name and expectations of this future lord?'

'How can I tell?' said Monana, fiercely. 'I have not set eyes on her since the time she ran away from the Camp till to-night. I was looking for Djarrah, not her.'

'And you killed her by proxy,' he said, drily, as he held the door open; 'and since I have work to do, I will wish you good evening.'

And he thrust her from the door just as Yuntha woke from her heavy slumber and started up.

'Come and eat,' he said, abruptly, and led her to the table, at which he made her sit, and swallow what he put before her.

He watched her keenly as she filled the unaccustomed place, and his fastidious taste was satisfied with each gesture and action of this young savage, who had neither been spoiled nor improved by civilised life. But when she had eaten a few morsels, and drunk a little of the tea that she found so nasty, the girl looked anxiously at her father who had touched nothing, and implored him to eat.

'Why should I?' he said, and already she found his tones strangely altered. 'Besides, while you slept, child, I got a blow—a bad blow—and it bleeds.'

'She has wounded you again!' said Yuntha, approaching him with anxiety and love in her blue eyes.

'Ay, to the heart,' he said; 'but you are safe, child—her poisoned words have not struck *you*.'

She took his burning hand in her two cold ones.

'Father, father,' she said, 'can we do nothing—is there no cure?'

'None,' he said, harshly; then added, looking at her searchingly, 'You could die for the man you loved?'

'Yes,' she said, in a voice stern as his, 'but to live would be nobler — and harder.'

'Then you mean to live for your lover?' he said, his eyes still probing hers.

'Unless the tribe kills me,' she said.

'You expect him to return?'

'No.'

'He wished to remain?'

'Yes.'

'Yet he never told you his name?' said John Trefusis, looking at her face as one who doubts her truth.

'Never,' said Yuntha, laying her father's hand down, and lifting her head proudly. 'Why should I wish to know his name? He did not trouble about mine. . . . We loved one another, and that was enough.'

There was a question in her father's heart that he dared not ask—the purity of the girl's eyes defied him, as she stood waiting for him to speak.

'Did he offer to take you with him to England?'

'No.'

'He would have made you his wife here, but not in England?'

She turned from him a moment, all the wounded pride and bitter shame that she had so deeply buried dragged to the light of day by her father's words . . . then she said coldly, 'That is so.'

She was himself over again in her pluck, coolness, and stoicism under pain, and as she faced him, he swore in his heart that if Guy Trefusis had fooled her, she should have the power placed in her hands of punishing him more riehly than he ever dreamt of, when he slighted John Trefusis' daughter.

'Was it because of your colour?' he said,

seeing his own likeness in her more than ever as she faced him.

'He knew me only as a savage,' she said, proudly; 'and white men do not take women like us to their English homes—they prefer us for their sweethearts; but they go home for their wives.'

'By heaven!' cried her father, fiercely, 'did he ever offer you insult?'

'None,' she said, 'beyond wishing to make me his wife here, instead of in England.'

There was the indomitable pride of Cucumber Jack himself in the girl's quiet voice, and the flash of her blue eyes slew whatever doubts of Guy's chivalry, or of her weakness, that might have plagued him.

'He would have married you, and remained?' he said.

'Yes.'

'He had a great future before him at home?' said her father.

'I sent him back to it,' she said, instantly; then added in the same breath, 'What do you know of him? Did you ever see him in England?'

John Trefusis had begun to whistle softly to himself, and, still whistling, sat down and looked at the fire.

He had decided most of the problems of his life off-hand, but here was one that puzzled him, and urgently demanded time in which to be thought out; and, just then, time was the one thing not at his command.

Soon he would not be able to think consecutively, and an intense desire to sleep threatened to overcome him. The fixed look of pain in his features struck Yuntha keenly, as he turned to her and said,—

'You had a savage lover—what has become of him?'

Yuntha's eyes sank.

'I do not know,' she said. 'I was going to look for him—and Billy—when you

found me. But I am afraid they are in pursuit of him, for he contrived the escape of the Englishman.'

'And yours?' said the father, curtly.

'I went with him because—because if I had not gone, he must have been taken,' said Yuntha, sadly; 'and Billy was wounded, and could not come with us. But Djarrah overtook us, and saved us from our pursuers ——'

'And paid for your safety with his life?' said her father, with the coldest look he had given her yet.

'Monana would not let them harm him,' she said, anxiously; 'and all the tribe loved him so—and hated me,' she added below her breath.

'Yet you seemed happy with them,' he said, having caught her last words.

'I knew of no better before I met him,' she said, gravely.

'He has made you respect civilisation?' said John Trefusis.

'Yes. Why did you not give me a chance of learning some of your English ways?' she added, looking wistfully at her father; 'to live a free life, and yet not to be quite a savage—that must be existence.'

'You had Billy to teach you,' said her father, brusquely.

'Have you small and great people in England?' she said, earnestly; 'and are they alike, yet different to each other in their words and ways? For Billy was different to you, and—the Englishman.'

'Is there no difference among the savages?' he said. 'And he was a fine fellow,' he added, thinking of Djarrah, 'you would have done better to marry him, and live among your adopted people.'

'If I cannot live, I can die among them,' she said, proudly; then tears sprang to her eyes, and she pressed both hands to her heart.

'I think he must be dead,' she sighed

rather than spoke, 'or why should Monana wish to kill me? And if he had died, it has been for me and *him*.'

'Your mother was no coquette,' he said, his voice growing more harsh each moment that the agony in him grew. 'Who taught you to despise an honest man's love, and be made the tool of a false one?'

'Perhaps I have my father's blood in me,' she said, with one swift fierce glance at him of which she was instantly ashamed; 'but I never promised Djarrah to be his wife—he was my cousin, and I loved him—that was all!'

'Sam was a fool,' said her father, bitterly, 'he wanted to secure for you a life from which you would have run away, and he spoiled your pleasure in the one that you had. Suppose the Englishman would have taken you to England, what would you have done there?'

'My duty,' she said.

Duty!' She was echoing Sam's eyes,

and the word was hateful to John Trefusis, more hateful than ever now that he *must* face it, when formerly it was only that he would not.

'Have you done it hitherto?' he said. 'If so, you would be with your tribe—not here.'

But Yuntha thought her duty lay with *him*, as he made a step or two forward, then staggered, and fell across the bed whence she had but now risen.

She came close, and wrung her hands as she looked down at the unconscious figure, for he was already asleep.

She knew all the symptoms so well—he would sleep possibly for hours, then waken in delirium to suffer hideous agonies of which the brain took no count, and then perchance there would be a brief flash of consciousness that might last only a few moments, or even an hour—then death.

He had fallen with his face towards her; she might gaze at her leisure on the father

whom she had found so late, and who was leaving her so quickly, having at least given his life for her, as that other unknown man had done, the 'Sam' to whom her heart had so often wistfully turned as she recalled Billy's words.

And now the two men were as but a hand's-breadth from each other, and betwixt her and them was life—and she was alone.

CHAPTER VII.

Now haud your tongue, my daughter dear,
For a' this breeds but sorrow,
I'll wed ye to a better lord
Than him ye lost on Yarrow.

TOWARDS morning John Trefusis opened his eyes, stirred, and spoke.

'Are you there, Wanda?' he said. 'You are up early, as usual . . . . and I was late last night—but we were playing down below, and it's a steep climb, and you were asleep when I came home. Do you see that great broad, red-faced man over there? That's Sam — my friend. I always promised I'd bring him to see you one day. You liked him for my sake, and he'll do his best double-shuffle in your honour; he means well, and is faithful as death.

What's this? Cold, cold, my girl! And a minute ago you kissed me. Hark! was that a child crying? Deal the cards. . . . . Curse that barrel with Sam on the top of it. . . . . They're doubles, and I hate repetition. . . . . Darn you! why need you quarrel over your luck? Your bullets may pierce skulls, but there are no brains behind them. Where's Sam? Sneaked off to bed, of course. Whoever found him doing anything but what was virtuous? And the little beggar has got enough food to last till to-morrow. Hang the gold dust! you hardly need to wash the dirt, so fast it sticks, and Sam's taken a holiday—the first since I knew him.'

Yuntha held her breath as her father tossed and turned on his bed, then spoke again, more rapidly and incoherently than before.

'Gone! and the pillow warm. Has that old fool tracked me here? . . . . Euchred! by heaven! What has come

to the honest fool? His eyes follow me—gooseberry eyes, and dull as ditchwater they used to be—but now they shine as if they reflected gold dust, and they look at me as if I were a murderer. . . . . Hang those frills. . . . . I got them from Melbourne to please her, and I must have snatched it up by mistake. . . . . Sawyering! What does a man want with trees who doesn't know a green one from a blue? Blue eyes! What does the fool mean? Thief! So that's over. Sam's Sweetheart—the whole camp's mad. What's this? Brown as a berry — the new countess — coloured!'

He opened his eyes as he muttered these last words, and looked suspiciously at Yuntha.

'What nonsense have I been raving?' he said, harshly. 'Why do you sit there listening? There are books yonder—go and read, if you know how—and stop your ears, if a woman can.'

She rose at once, and went to the table on which the lamp burned, then chose a book from the case hard by, and sat down with it in her hand.

'So you *can* read?' said John Trefusis.

'Yes.'

'And write?'

'Yes.'

By a supreme effort he dragged himself from the bed, and rose to his feet.

Yuntha had started up when he moved, and now put her slender arms round him in support as he moved to the table.

As he sank heavily into the chair his strained eyes met hers, and he said, 'You know how your mother died?'

'No—but we need not pity her . . . she loved you, and you loved her . . . and she died in your arms.'

'And you could be happier dying so than living apart from the man you loved?' he said, forcing back by sheer strength of will the delirium that crawled

through every vein, and struggled to mount to his brain.

'Yes,' she said, gently.

'But supposing that duty commanded you to live and forget him,' said John Trefusis, his voice harsh with bodily anguish, 'what would be your choice then?'

'To live.'

'Then as soon as I am dead, you will go to England—you will go humbly, and in the state that befits a poor dependent, to some relations of mine, named Trefusis.'

He watched her keenly as he said the name, but her features showed no recognition of it, only a troubled hope and fear that painted her cheek red and pale by turns. And yet (an uncommon thing in a woman), she asked no question, but waited for his next word.

'I said that you must go humbly—for you would go as my steward—mark you, as my *unknown* steward, to the estates and duties which I have neglected, and which

will shortly belong to a man who may have as little notion of what he owes to either, as I have had.'

'You were a great man, then, in your own country,' said Yuntha, simply, 'and you left it all for my mother, as *he* would have done for me?'

'Write,' he said, sternly, and from where he sat, snatched writing materials, and set them before her; then seeing her at a loss, dragged paper and pen towards him and struggled to put down the day's date.

But Yuntha had by now caught the meaning of the writing materials (so different to the rude means by which Billy had taught her), and she took the pen out of her father's nerveless hand, and kneeling beside him, asked what she should set down.

'Gentlemen,' he said, and she wrote the word at once in a clear, characteristic hand; 'you will, by next mail, inform my heir, or his solicitors, of my death, proofs

of such death being furnished you by the bearer of this letter, who attends me in my last illness. You have all my papers in your possession, with the exception of a small packet that I have placed in the care of the young woman who will hand you this. You may subsequently hear more of these papers, and may be called upon to bear witness that I deposited such papers with her.'

Yuntha's pen ceased with John Trefusis' voice, so slowly had he spoken, so superhuman was the effort with which he held the mastery of his speech and brain.

'You have in your possession certain moneys of mine, these you will transmit to the Rev. Amos Trefusis, vicar of Upthorn, Devon, England, in trust for the bearer of this letter, and you will give her into his charge upon my behalf, requesting him to deduct the cost of her maintenance, until such time as she shall choose to leave him to marry, or to return to her own

country, when, if she be in want of money, he shall supply her with what may be left in his hands.

'You will authorise my London solicitors (whose address you have) to place my heir in possession of the estates, and duly furnish them with particulars of my death; but you will preserve silence on the subject of the young girl I have mentioned, and my dispositions regarding her.

'As soon as possible after the receipt of this letter, you will procure for her an outfit, and take her passage home without delay. Her name is "Sam's Sweetheart."'

His voice ceased, and the pen stopped.

'Give me the letter,' he said, a few moments later, and knowing that his strength was a matter of but moments now, she swiftly put the sheet, still wet, before him, and thrust a pen into his hand.

She turned aside as he scrawled some-

thing at the foot of the page, then folded the letter and enclosed it.

When she had kneeled down beside him and written the address on it, he said,—

'You spoke just now of duty—are you prepared to do yours towards me as your father?'

'Surely,' she said, calmly.

'Then when I am dead, you will take this letter in safety to Bathurst. You will deliver it, and render implicit obedience to the men who receive it. You will go to England, where you will be received by kind people, and you will make it your business to find out if my heir, Guy Trefusis, is proving himself worthy of his inheritance.'

'How shall I find him?' she said, as he stopped.

'The man to whom you are going is his cousin. Sooner or later you will meet this young man. If he wishes to marry you, burn the documents I shall presently give

you. If he slights you because you are poor and unprotected, read them, then go straight to him under whose care I have placed you, and tell him to take you to my solicitors.'

'Why should he wish to marry me?' she said, proudly, 'or why should he slight me? My father's heir is nothing to me—if I go to England it will not be to marry, but to do my duty.'

'Who taught you the meaning of the word?' he said.

'Billy.'

'A foe will sometimes serve one better than a friend,' he said, cynically. 'Here, take this—guard it beyond your life;' then, even as he tore a packet from his breast and thrust it into her hand, fell back raving and unconscious in his chair.

She lifted him in her strong young arms, and carried him back to the bed, where he lay tossing through long miserable hours till day had fully broke, when

suddenly he opened his eyes, and stood erect.

'Wanda!' he said, and went straight to the door and unbarred it, then, without one backward look at the huddled-up figure on his threshold, or the girl beyond it, strode out into the exquisite freshness and beauty of the morning, its chillness for a moment checking the delirium in his veins, so that he stood still to look up with the old keen love in mere existence that had once made all his happiness.

It smote upon his senses then, how often he had seen such a sky as this without heeding it, how beautiful was the world he was leaving at little more than middle age, with the springs of life yet strong in him, and a new human interest born to him out of the ashes of the past. His delirium and pain left him as he walked on and on. He was young once more, and Wanda flitted before him in her youth and love. . . . . Hark! were those

light sounds that followed him the footsteps of her pursuers? On and on he pushed till he reached the water's edge, then, as the chill water rippled to his feet, his senses came back, and he saw Yuntha.

'Bury me here,' he said, then stretched his arms straight out, and, standing with his face to the sea, died.

CHAPTER VIII.

O! cauld and bare his bed will be
When winter's storms sing in the tree,
At his head a turf, at his feet a stone,
He will sleep, nor hear the maiden's moan;
O'er his white bones the birds shall fly,
The wild deer bound, and foxes cry!

An hour went by, but still Yuntha sat by the water's edge, with her father's head upon her knees, and her eyes fixed on the stretch of blue shining water towards which he had stepped out so boldly to meet her mother.

Were they together now, would she know this worn, middle-aged man, for the lover from whom she had parted seventeen years ago?

Yuntha's eyes came back to his face, so much more beautiful in death than it had

ever been in life, and with already imprinted on it that peace which John Trefusis had spent his restless life in seeking, but never found.

He had lived his existence out according to his will, but had he obtained more happiness than the man who, seeing his duty plain before him, goes straight for it, and at eventide sleeps soundly, knowing that he has earned his rest? Duty! as though some breath from the dead man's spirit passed to hers, the girl was busy with thought of what in dying he had been compelled to face, and in some hasty fashion he had made shift to satisfy. But what was *hers*, what lay beyond the hour of noon when she should have buried him, and have to choose between the path to the camp, or that mission to Bathurst which he had commanded?

Which was her duty? To the people among whom she had lived her life, or to those unknown relatives in England who

would receive her as a savage and outcast, and among whom her place must be that of a spy? Her father's heir was cousin to the people to whom he had sent her; but how was she to know if he were idle and dissolute, or if they met, why should he either fall in love with, or slight her? Those papers, hurriedly thrust inside the linen that she wore next her green leaves, might enlighten her; but some curious sense of honour, more common in the savage than the civilised being, robbed her hand of any impulse towards them. How big was her father's country? Too big to meet by chance the man from whom she had parted but three days ago? And if they met, he would think she had come over to look for him, and perhaps she would see his sweetheart; and here the girl's heart leapt up with a throb of jealousy and pride that shamed her as it rose, and brought her back trembling to gaze at what was on her knee.

If she had found strength to urge her lover to fulfil *his* duty without thought of himself and her, should she not find it for herself, even though their lives rolled on like two rivers, that moving in parallel courses, are for ever divided?

Hark! What was that? As she turned slowly, she knew that she was no longer alone with her dead, for Monana was beside her.

The old woman looked grimly down on the pale face that rested on Yuntha's knee, then squatting on the ground hard by, gazed at him still, and muttered to herself feebly, and without her usual venom of look and word.

'Mother, daughter, and daughter's child —all the prey of the white man,' she said,' then added in trembling, but exultant accents, 'but this man was the best of the three—for he married my girl—and he could do no more if she had been a white woman of his own country. And

so your lover has sailed away,' she added, 'and your heart is breaking for him as Djarrah's broke for you.'

'Did I not swear to dwell with you and your adopted people?' said Yuntha, proudly; 'why then should I go away with the Englishman? Djarrah knew that I should come back, and his heart cannot be broken—and—and he is well?' she added, trembling at the change that shot across Monana's features.

'Ay! well enough,' said Monana, with the wail of a dying wild creature in her voice, 'he is blind—one of the spears that should have pierced your English lover entered his eye, and destroyed it, the other was affected, and in darkness he flees from those who would succour and tend him, for the vengeance of the camp is satisfied now.'

Yuntha's heart seemed to turn to stone in her breast. Was it to this she had brought the noble fellow who had saved her lover's life?

Blind! Never more to watch day breaking over the hills and valleys that he loved so well . . . never to see the morning mists roll down the steep precipices, or the dew vanish beneath the pure, cool breath of the Australian dawn—never more, with keen eyes, to track his game to its lair, to mark the exquisite hues of the flowers and trees that were ever in his path—never more to see the beauty of her whom he loved, the idol of his eyes—for ever a blind Samson shorn of his strength, and to be loved out of pure pity, and guarded like a child.

Yuntha's brown head dropped to her father's, and with her arms round his neck, and one deep, awful sob, she wept aloud.

'Why do you weep?' said Monana, angrily. 'It is in your own hands. You can give him back more than his sight if you will. Your English lover has left you. Djarrah loves you and will make you his

wife, and you will be eyes to him, and he will be happy.

But Yuntha cried on, and on, over that quiet head below. The hard ache in her heart was not to be washed out by a few passionate tears; but presently she looked up and said, 'I will find him. I will stay awhile with him, and then I must go away to fulfil a duty; but I will come back to him!'

'And whither does your duty take you?' cried Monana, fiercely.

'To England,' said Yuntha.

'After your English lover?'

'Such talk is not seemly in the presence of the dead,' said Yuntha; 'the murdered dead,' she added, as she laid his head gently down, then stooping, lifted him up and carried him in her strong young arms to the shade of a tree where she left him, and came back to Monana.

'Tell me what you have to say,' said Yuntha, and it was as judge rather than

culprit that she stood before the old woman who had ruled her life, 'for I have work to do—work at which I do not need your presence.'

'Who taught you to speak your father's tongue so glibly?' cried the old woman, fiercely; 'you kept your secret well enough till that man came.'

'As you kept yours,' said Yuntha, looking steadily at her grandmother; 'you brought me up under false pretences—my very colour was a fraud that you practised on those among whom I lived—and upon me.'

'A deceit you deliberately continued when you were old enough to choose for yourself,' said Monana, sullenly.

'Because I knew I could not live in peace with the tribe if my colour were different to theirs,' said Yuntha, in mournful tones, 'and I knew no other life, and you had taught me that the whites were cruel and wicked beyond belief.'

'And aren't they?' cried Monana, with a angry snarl. 'Listen, girl, and hear your mother's story, and that of her mother before her. I was born a Maori woman,—so much you know, but not the rest. I was married by my tribe when very young to a great Maori warrior, who thought less of me, and of my child, than of the polish I could put on his beautiful mere, or the weapons that unnatural patience and skill could fashion for him. I was beautiful and treated like a slave: my spirit rebelled, and when one of our enemies the white men saw and pretended to love me, I left my Maori home, willingly taking my little son, the father of Djarrah. But I had only entered a slavery worse than the last, and often I wished that my tribe had overtaken and killed me, for to every vice of the savage he brought another of his own; and during the four years that I lived with him in the bush, my nature and heart hardened, and grew nearly as vile as his.

I learned his language, I read his books; but I learned more than that—to the core of his heart I learned *him*, and despised and hated the whole race for his sake!'

Monana paused, exhausted by the energy with which she spoke, and Yuntha pitied her, and thought of Guy.

'One day he left me without a word. He had hated me for a long while, and only stayed because I was his drudge and made the hut comfortable, from which he carried on vast timber operations, and by which he made much English gold. But he left none behind for me and my boy,—none for the daughter I had borne him. Winter was drawing in; the famine months were at hand when the savage curses his existence, and only in large tribes is there food and safety; my stores were exhausted, and I could not leave my children to undertake a fifty-miles journey to procure more. I supported them and myself by the scanty fruits of my own toil

and skill in snaring animals; but we were hungry—always hungry, and the boy and girl sickened; and at last fury seized me, and I said, "Let us all die together!" For the boy is a Maori and will grow up like his father, and the girl is beautiful and nearly as white as her father, and will become the prey of the white man in time.

'I left them and went out into the forest. The night was cold, the moon and stars were shining, and I went on and on till, to my surprise, I came upon the outskirts of an encampment within which was warmth and food,—for these despised savages have a thousand ways of satisfying hunger that are entirely unknown to the Maories. I thought myself unobserved, but an old man came towards me, and by signs invited me to enter. As I stood faint and trembling in their midst, a young chief drew near and looked at me, then made some request that I could not understand, but which they clearly refused. He retired

with disappointment in his looks, but not before our eyes had met, and I knew that he had fallen in love with me. Then the women fed me, and gave more to carry away; after which I was conducted to the outskirts of the camp and left to find my way home. I had almost reached it when there appeared at my side the chief who had looked at me, but before he could say a word I threw open the hut door, and pointed to the two starving children.'

Monana's eyes and voice had softened,—some of the old beauty had returned to her, and without that hardness which had repelled two men, but attracted and dominated a third, and through him become virtually the ruler of a tribe.

'Did it scare him away, my young, my beautiful chief?' cried Monana, passionately. 'We had no words in common, but the language of love is the same all the world over; and when he kneeled down beside me, and helped feed my children, my eyes

and heart went together, and I loved him even while I sent him away.

'But he came back,—every day he stole away from the camp and brought us food, every day he implored me by signs to be his wife. I had got *love* at last, and it came to me like a bone thrown to a hungry dog. But I could not take it, and meanwhile he pined and dwindled, till one day came to me an old chief, accompanied by an interpreter, who formally made offer of the young chief to me in marriage, and promised to honour me and receive me as his wife, though I had nothing to offer in exchange.

'I asked time to consider, and they gave me three days.

'When they had gone, I went to the bed that held my two children, and looked at them. One was a Maori and of the highest type of beauty, and of olive-colour like myself; the other almost a white girl, and the image of her handsome, inhuman father.

I seemed to love the boy best as I looked, —he was nearer to the colour of the man I loved.

'Would a Maori have done it?—would a white man?' cried Monana, fiercely, while a tinge of colour touched her cheek. 'No! and that was why I hesitated; but he came to me and pleaded, however dumbly. And when the three days were over, with a child in either hand, he led me to the camp, and by some sort of ceremony we were made man and wife. But though he was powerful and protected me from insult, he could not stop the women's looks and gibes, the men's contempt of him; and none,—none of them could forgive me my colour. And one day (for he had authority as the son of their oldest chief) he called the tribe together, and bade those who would follow him, come, for he had resolved to migrate towards the more uninhabited parts of New South Wales.

'None opposed him, but many followed

us; so that where we were once but fifty souls, now we number nigh on five hundred. Moving gradually, we found at last the beautiful, remote valley to which your white lover penetrated,' added Monana; 'and there we made our fixed encampment, driving out those aborigines who, in comparison with our people, were but little better than wild beasts. So we waxed and throve, picking out here and there a man or woman handsome enough to intermarry with our tribe.

'And my son married a strange woman, more beautiful than you, and bore him a son and died. And I called the child, "Djarrah," after my chief, for my son loved him, and they died side by side—my chief and he. And I mourned the two in one,' cried Monana, 'and, save Djarrah, loved no human creature again!'

'And my mother?' said Yuntha, faintly.

'She left me as heartlessly as her father did,' said Monana, bitterly. 'One hour I

spoke to her of marrying, the next she was gone; but my chief being dead, I was able to pursue her.'

'And you found her?' said Yuntha, trembling.

'Ay!—I found her—dead. She died by poison—administered by her own hand to escape from the white man.'

'How can you tell?' said Yuntha, coldly. 'But since you have buried *him* (she made a backward gesture of the hand to her unburied dead) you are quits.'

'More,' said Monana, grimly, 'for I stole *you!*'

'Did he want me?' said Yuntha.

'Not he!—but the pack of gold diggers who made fools of themselves over you, never found out who stole you, and always thought you were with him.'

'And *he* knew?' said Yuntha, 'and did he never try to claim me?'

'What did he want with you?' cried Monana, furiously. 'Is the white man ever

proud of his child by a savage? More than once he crossed our tracks, and I knew he had a hut whence he could watch you, but for years he never found out that the coloured baby I brought back to the camp was you.'

'And why have you told me all this?' said Yuntha, moved and amazed at this spectacle of the weakness of her grandmother, the iron woman, the sorceress of the tribe.

'It is to prove to you that with the white man you will have no happiness, that the savage will give you more,' said Monana, as she struggled to her feet and laid a burning hand on Yuntha's arm; 'and you will be happy with him as I was with my young chief, though Djarrah is blind and dependent upon you.'

These words smote the girl's heart. Then she said slowly, 'But I swore to *him* to do my duty!' and she glanced backwards.

'Did he do his?' cried Monana,—'the

man who has left you nothing but a name!'

'I don't know it,' said Yuntha; 'but he told me where to go and what I must do, though I never saw what he signed to his letter.'

'Where is it?' said Monana.

'Here,' said Yuntha, and touched her breast; and now you will leave me, for I am going to bury him.'

When she had brought him to the pale-green grass that grew so close to the water's edge, she kissed him softly—once for her mother and once for herself—on brow and chin, then turned and looked back.

Before her lay the ranges of thick, almost impenetrable bush, through which her father had stepped so swiftly, the huge forest trees with their dark foliage standing out against the vividly blue sky, dwarfed by the height of the steep rocks that formed their back-ground. From above, the sun was beginning to beat fiercely down on her

uncovered head, and her heart went a little cold as she thought of how she must now begin that task of burial to which she had been commanded.

She was familiar enough with the forms of burial of her own people, but how were white men laid to rest, and with what ceremonies?

The tide had retreated as she sat, and now a few yards of sand lay between her and the water that had rippled about his feet. He had said 'Bury me here;' but should she leave him the sport of the waves, the prize of the sea-birds, his bones tossed hither and thither by night and day?

'What ails you?' said Monana, with an angry snarl; 'have you never seen a dead man before? Leave him to me—such work is not for young hands, and there's strength enough left in mine for that.'

'You shall not touch him,' said Yuntha, standing tall and straight by his body, her

beautiful eyes blazing with wrath; 'you killed him—and his very flesh would creep if you laid your hands upon it.'

'It was an accident,' said Monana, sullenly, 'but *you* put out the sight of Djarrah's eyes as surely as though you had pierced his eyeballs with your own hand; far better for him if he had died on the day you ran away with the Englishman; it was not for his own life that he left the camp—but to save yours.'

Yuntha had put up one slender arm as though to shield her eyes from the sun, but when slowly she drew it away, it was to see standing at a few paces from Monana, a man's figure—it was Djarrah's.

Mournful, and in an attitude of listening, he stood like a statue of bronze, undisfigured by his blindness, but with a pathetic expression on his features that contrasted sadly with the daring and pride of his former glance.

He held his arrows, and was equipped

for hunting and fighting as usual, but their use had partly gone with his sight. Tears of anguish rose in Yuntha's eyes, as they met those sightless ones that would never behold, or rejoice in her more.

She ran past Monana, who with head bowed upon her knees had seen and heard nothing, then sobbing put both arms about her cousin's neck, and kissed him.

Body and soul he shivered with ecstasy as her lips touched his neck. He had found her. Blind and helpless as he was, his senses had not left him; and as his strong arms closed round her slender body, the spirit in him leaped up with as much joy as though he still beheld earth and her. Only for a moment their hearts beat together, then with a shriek Monana, who had turned, tore them apart, and with frantic love kissed his hands, his breast, his feet, pouring out on him epithets of the most passionate devotion.

He touched her kindly, but his sightless

eyes turned to where Yuntha stood, and he stretched out his hand towards her, trembling as he felt it taken in both hers, and pressed close to her throbbing heart.

Had he not saved her lover, and lost all for her sake, and did she not dearly love him, with that strong deep affection which was second only to the supreme passion of her life?

Monana snatched his hand out of hers, and thrust her back.

'Go and bury your dead,' she snarled; 'it is unseemly that he should lie thus on the shore. Dig a deep hole, and lay him with his feet to the water and his head to the green—he'll sleep as soundly there as at home with his white kith and kin.'

Djarrah's arms fell to his sides, and he stood rigid as stone. Who was this white man who awaited burial, and why had Yuntha received him with such a welcome as she had denied him the last time they met?

Yuntha read this hope and fear in his face, and slow tears ran down her own as she said,—

'He is my father. . . .

Djarrah's head sank, but the next moment he lifted it, and, speaking in his own tongue, said,—

'Such work is not for you. Show me where you would have him lie, and I will make it ready.'

'I will help you,' said Yuntha, in a voice that would not be gainsayed, and taking his hand she led him to where John Trefusis lay, with one arm cast above him as though in slumber.

Then the pair stooped, and she lifting his head, and her cousin his feet, they laid him down gently with his face to the sea, and with Djarrah's hatchet marked out his length on the sand, then with the inadequate weapons that they commanded began slowly and painfully to dig out the sand and throw it in heaps on one side.

Sometimes the girl would pause, and leaning on her hands, looked across to Djarrah, who worked with unerring swiftness, and scarcely a trace of the blindness that had overtaken him, while hard by, Monana looked on with alternate scowls for Yuntha, and looks of passionate love for her grandson.

As hour after hour went by, still the two toiled on without a pause for rest, and without uttering a syllable. But by noon was dug a deep and narrow trench that would hold its guest beyond the power of wind or wave to disturb, and then the man and girl paused from their labours and drew together. The sun was beating fiercely down on their uncovered heads, both had been fasting for long hours, and their morning's work had tested each nerve and muscle to their utmost; but neither thought of food or rest until all should be done.

"When Yuntha had taken the shoes from

his feet and the shirt from his back, they lifted John Trefusis, and carried him down to the water, where she bathed and washed him with many a bitter tear above the wound in his breast.

Then once more they took him in their arms, and when he was dressed, the girl stooped down and kissed his lips, his brow and cheek, and kneeling down, they lowered him into the narrow grave with the green bush to his back, the sea to his feet, and heaven's eternal blue above him. Over his head the waters would toss, and the winds play—life, movement, change would be stirring above and around his bed . . . those voices of the forest that he so dearly loved would in spring and summer be blown to his ears, while in time of winter there would be the cry of the penguin, and the roar of the ocean round his sea-girt home for lullaby.

CHAPTER IX.

Why's your feet sae braid?' she said,
'And why so red your e'en?'
'Because I've travelled mony gaits,
And mony sights I've seen.'

'So that's over,' said Monana, in the tongue of the tribe, as the young pair approached her; 'go now and eat. You have yet much work to do, and will need your strength.'

'And you, mother?' said Djarrah, pausing.

'I will eat later,' she said; 'go.' And, accustomed to obey her, Djarrah moved away with Yuntha beside him.

As they went a look of the deadliest revenge and love blended shot across her features.

Already she had bitterly repented of the

gentleness into which her own love-story had betrayed her, already, seeing how it had failed to touch and win Yuntha to Djarrah, she was her old malevolent self, with heart arid save for the one green spot that enclosed alike her dead chief and her grandson Djarrah.

The girl should live among the tribe that she despised, the tribe that had so little of the traits of the ordinary aborigine, as to confuse Guy, she should learn to love it, to cling to it as a refuge from the white man who had been more merciful in leaving than if he had taken her.

Yuntha's punishment should be short and sharp, but Djarrah should be *happy*, swore Monana, who had not yet plumbed those depths of Djarrah's nature that Yuntha sounded so easily, so that the old woman little knew the powers of suffering and self-sacrifice that beat beneath the breast of her only son's son.

She knew that death was at hand, that

the excitement and agony of the past weeks had broken the health already impaired, but she would live long enough to tie together the two who were even now disappearing from her sight.

Djarrah moved with head erect, and his usual swift, noiseless step, and boomerang ready poised to strike the first game that should cross his path; it was almost impossible to realise that he was blind, while with eyes fixed on him, Yuntha ran at his side, scarce able to keep pace with him, so eager was he to procure the food she so greatly needed.

An innocent opossum taking a mid-day stroll happened to be the first captive of his bow and spear—a mere rustle had betrayed him to Djarrah, and Yuntha's clever fingers quickly gathered fuel, and kindled fire from the pieces of touchwood that she always carried, and in a few minutes their slender breakfast was cooking before them.

For a moment Yuntha covered her eyes.

It was all so like, but so different to those morning meals at which she and her lover had met so gladly, and her heart was heavy with the thought of her father, and the duty that lay before her—then she looked up at Djarrah, and blamed the selfishness that for a moment had made her forget him.

She would weep no more, though one who loved might well weep over Djarrah—for the eloquent beauty grown dim and pale, as it were, in a night, for the quenched light of the clear and flashing eye, and virile pride that exulted in its own strength, and made each breath that he drew a joy to him.

Stilled were the fierce passions that had once flamed in his breast, his haughty spirit had bent itself like a reed to the power of love, and for a woman's sake he had sacrificed home, friends, personal safety, and—bitterest of all to forego—revenge.

As Yuntha gazed at him, the tears

against which she struggled overcame her, and dropping her head upon his hand, she sobbed aloud.

Was she weeping for her English lover or for him? Djarrah did not know, as he smoothed the soft rings of hair back from her brow, and with head thrown back, and pulses that throbbed with some of their old strength, realised only that she was once more beside him. They spoke but little, and not at all of the subject next their hearts as they ate their scanty meal, then saving some of the meat carried it with them to Monana, who sat by the shore, rigid and silent as a petrified corpse. When they placed the food before her, she took no heed of it, but in a curious voice bade Djarrah stoop down that she might raise herself by his neck, and as he kneeled she climbed upon his back and clasping her shrivelled arms beneath his chin, laughed hideously as she bade him carry her 'home.'

'To the camp?' exclaimed Yuntha, turning pale.

'Ay!' said the old woman, with a look that it might have enlightened the girl to see; 'they'll not hurt Djarrah there—nor you either if you've courage to go with him.'

'Where Djarrah does not fear to go, neither do I,' said Yuntha, proudly, forgetting her father and the duty left her to fulfil.

But Djarrah, with the old witch's arms half throttling him, in a few brief passionate words, urged the girl not to return with him, though the laws of the tribe and the filial obedience that, save in one instance, he had invariably shown Monana, left him no choice but to take her back to die in the camp, for there was death in her voice, and he knew it.

'Ay,' said Monana, tauntingly, 'send him back alone—there'll be none to take care of him when I'm gone—blind and helpless, and all your work, your work?'

'I will go with you,' said Yuntha, and she put her hand in Djarrah's and drew him in the direction of the camp, then suddenly loosed him and ran back to press her lips to the sand above her father's grave.

CHAPTER X.

Then out and spak' the fifth o' them,
'I wot they are lovers dear!'
And out and spak' the fourth o' them,
'They hae lo'ed this mony a year!'
CLERK SAUNDERS.

WHEN four days later, Djarrah stalked into the encampment with what looked like a bundle of rags on his back, and two witch hands clutched beneath his throat, with Yuntha stepping pale and fearless by his side, men and women alike stared at them as spectres, and for a moment or two not a soul spoke. It was the hour when, having dined happily on the fruits of the day's spoils, the men experienced that benignant after-

glow of spirit (or shall we say stomach?), that is not unknown to his white brother, and the women, seizing their opportunity, were happy, too, arranging various schemes of adornment, lovemaking, &c., and various other subtleties whose workings are hid from the masculine mind. But the warriors sat erect, and the women dropped their whispers, or gewgaws, or babies, as the blind man came to a halt in their midst, obedient to the sudden clutch of the talons beneath his chin.

Then, as Djarrah stood motionless, and Yuntha's blue eyes roved from face to face, only to find hatred and vengeance revealed in each, a chief, stouter-hearted than the rest, rose, and approached the silent trio—silent because one was dying, one listening, and the third aware that the finest speech could neither better nor worsen her situation.

But before the warrior could speak, before the women could spit out their

venom at Yuntha for causing the death of more than one lover or husband, Monana unlocked her arms from Djarrah's neck, and slipped to the ground.

A dozen arms were stretched to lift her up, for if the sanctity of birth is but little regarded among savages, that of death is rigorously observed and respected, and the humblest man or woman in a camp absorbs its whole attention when the moment of dying comes.

They carried her to the distance of half-a-dozen yards from her miam, and laid her on the grass, and while one supported her head, another placed a cord of fibre, the opossum rug that was to form her pall, and the weapons they had unbound from her waist, beside her.

The chiefs, councillors, and young men had all risen and closed round her in a semi-circle. Behind them were the women and children, while in the distance, alone and downcast, with the glorious

tints of the western sky at their backs, stood the guilty pair, whose sentence had been long ago registered in Monana's heart.

She had seemed dead when they lifted her, but now opened her eyes, and looked past all those who stood around, to those two beyond, her features convulsed by a spasm of mingled hatred and love.

Then she began to speak rapidly in their tongue, gesticulating with a vigour that might have cheated the onlookers into the belief that death was not yet imminent.

Her voice reached the cousins as it rose and fell, but they could not catch her words; and while Yuntha was too pre-occupied to heed the old woman's gestures, Djarrah, who would have read her conversation by them unerringly, stood with sightless eyes bent on the ground, thinking not of what might be his own punishment, but of Yuntha's.

As the minutes went by, and still the shrill voice sounded, and only frowns and disapproving looks from the chiefs, and doubtful ones from the women, replied to her, Yuntha, fatigued with standing, and having tasted nothing since morning, put her slender arm through Djarrah's, and with head to the side of his shoulder, leaned against him. Standing thus, she looked almost white beside his copper-coloured skin, and a low murmur broke from the women as they realised that what at first sight had seemed so strange to them in Yuntha was her changed colour, though in the shock of her unexpected appearance, they had thought only of her sins, and the lives she had cost them.

As that murmur rose, and the chiefs, warriors, and young men's eyes all followed the women's to rest on the girl, Monana ceased to speak, but her features took a cast none had ever seen before.

Then the oldest of the councillors spoke;

objecting to the clemency Monana advocated, and pointing out how by the girl's defiance of every tradition of the tribe, by her elopement with the Englishman, and by the life-blood that she had caused to be shed, she deserved and should suffer—death.

Then Monana's voice was heard once more, and as the wise-woman and sorceress of the tribe she uplifted it, and swore to invoke her deadliest curses on every man, woman, and child in the camp, unless her dying commands were fulfilled. As the weird threats poured from her lips the chiefs turned pale, and the women trembled, for the superstitions of a savage are the very breath of his life, and his rest at night would be disturbed if curses hovered around him.

And she had been the beloved wife of their greatest warrior, whose spirit might return to vex them if her commands were disobeyed. Yet men and

women alike felt with intense bitterness that for Yuntha to become Djarrah's wife was no punishment whatever, but rather a dignity which scarce a maiden in the camp had not coveted.

'And the girl loved him,' snarled the women below their breath, hating her all the more for the whiteness of her skin, and mistaking that helpless clinging of utter exhaustion for love; 'she had pleased her fancy with the Englishman, but comes home to Djarrah for care and shelter.'

Her weary looks, her tattered suit, appealed to the heart of not a man or woman there. She had never been one of them, even when her colour was like their own; and now that they understood the fraud so long practised upon them, they repudiated her with loathing, and thirsted for vengeance.

Monana saw the hardening faces around her, and feeling death imminent, and in

terror lest she should die before she had secured Djarrah's happiness and Yuntha's punishment, leaped to her feet and with fleshless arms tossed upwards, and dishevelled hair that tossed like snakes above her head, she opened her lips, as though to pour forth the curses that she had threatened.

But they were not uttered, for a hundred voices implored her to pause, while the chief, who had before spoken, was again heard, this time in sullen acquiescence to her desire, and the time for the nuptials of Djarrah and Yuntha fixed for the morning after the ceremonies of Monana's death.

Then the half-circle of onlookers broke, and was dispersed, only a few of the older women remaining to watch the death-struggles of one who had been profoundly feared, but never loved.

But not a word was spoken, the camp was silent, and the very babes noiselessly

hushed lest their cries should profane the stillness. In silence Yuntha was approached, and by a gesture commanded to return to her miam. In silence the finger which beckoned Djarrah to Monana was obeyed, and the blind led to her, and his hand placed in hers.

But it was not many moments before a cry of 'Djarrah!' rent the air, so piercing, so agonised, so full of the pent-up love of a hungry life, that the very soul of the woman seemed to rush out in it, so that on the wing of it she was borne out to that ocean upon whose breast perchance the black man and his white brother meet, and clasp hands—alike in the sight of God.

CHAPTER XI.

Gae comfor' weel your seven sons,
For man sall ne'er comfort me;
Ye'll merry marry me wi' the Queen o' Heaven,
For wedded I ne'er sall be!

THAT death-cry pierced Yuntha's ears and heart as she sat in the miam that apparently no loving foot had crossed since she had thrown down her work to go and play with the water-moles.

She covered her eyes, shuddering, as one who at unawares looks deep down into a human soul, and in one lightning flash sees the boundless waste of misery that it has traversed, yet never cried out against, till in the parting of spirit and dust human endurance fails, and in one shriek expresses the agony of a lifetime.

'Djarrah!'

The cry rang in Yuntha's ears . . . the fiercest blame and curses from Monana could not have moved the girl as did that single word, or hold up to her eyes with such awful distinctness the wrong that she had done, and the misery she had wrought him.

All the ingratitude that she had shown in preferring the stranger before him smote on Yuntha's mind, as her gaze wandered round the miam that her cousin had so adorned for her, that in every trifle she saw his hand and presence.

What was the acquaintance of a single day to her in comparison with the passionate devotion of the savage who, under her influence, had become almost as civilised as the white man, while borrowing none of his vices?

Love had sped the dart that flew from Djarrah's hand and transfixed the Englishman — love for *her*, and anger that the

shadow of an insult should approach what he loved.

And love had got his bitter wage for service done, in the blindness that had shut out all from him, even that last despairing look from the sole creature on earth who valued him beyond all else in it.

How long ago was it that she had thrown down her work, and crossed the ring of coutchgrass that was as emerald green to-day as it had been then?

It must be a year—six months—and all things had stood still in that time. . . . It was impossible that she had only been absent a score of days, in which she had lived her life, whether for good or evil.

Would she have had the unsatisfying past back? Does a true mother ever fold the linen about her dead child's face, and wish she had never looked upon it? Not even the thought of what she had cost Djarrah, or the doubt of her own impending fate, could make Yuntha unwish those

golden moments in which she had loved, and been beloved.

Better to die now, she thought, to be mourned by him, and lost in the first freshness and strength of love, than to meet him coldly as a stranger, to endure the heart-break of divided lives, or, yet more cruel fate, to see him happy with the beautiful Englishwoman. Had not Billy said it was in the nature of all men to forget, as the nature of all women to remember? And her duty must go undone—the letter in her bosom go undelivered, and her father's heir live unspied upon. But now it smote keenly upon Yuntha that she had deliberately disobeyed her father's dying behest in permitting herself to be goaded by Monana into returning to the camp.

For Djarrah was safe, none would harm him there; but even his love could not save her from the fate that she knew had been decided in the half-hour before she had been ordered to retire to her miam.

Ghastly memories of the deaths that had been died by erring women of the tribe flitted through Yuntha's mind, as she rose and looked through the crevice whence she had once watched so eagerly for the Englishman.

Already Monana was wrapped in her pall of opossum skin, made fast with cords, and the grass cleared around her so that she lay in the centre of a circular piece of dry earth, a few feet in diameter.

Four circles of male mourners had already formed on the edge of this cleared space, their bodies daubed with clay, their faces made curiously to resemble each other by the rings round their eyes, which they had carefully painted with white earth, and now bent sadly to the ground. At the distance of fifty to a hundred yards, the women had gathered, and gave utterance to wild lamentations; but the notes were plaintive, no harsh nor painful chord marred the rise and fall of the wave of

sound that, spreading beyond the mourners, receded in yet fainter and wilder notes far into the recesses of the forest.

For half-an-hour the wailing continued, then the doctor of the camp approached, and the digging of the grave was commenced. Not for woman is such grand sepulture as is now and again given to some warrior whose deeds have exalted his tribe. For him a river is diverted from its course, and a deep grave dug in its bed. Beside him are laid his spoils and trophies of the chase, and when he has been carefully covered, the waters are once more suffered to return to their course, so that all trace of the grave is lost.

For Monana a spot beyond the precincts of the camp was selected, and the grave carefully dug to a depth of five feet, then swept, and with its sides pared clean, was ready for the occupation of the body.

A burst of lamentation now sounded from the women, the male voices of the

mourners joining in with startling effect. At the same moment one of the chiefs advanced, and cutting a piece of bark from the nearest tree, trimmed it to exactly the size of the grave, where it was immediately placed, and over it strewn fresh leaves and twigs of the gum-tree, so as to form a soft bed.

Then Djarrah approached as chief mourner, and guided to the grave stood over it, one foot on one side of it, and one on the other, and tearing off his reed necklace, and the band that encircled his forehead, cast them into the grave.

Then, spear in hand, he rushed away at the women, as though to slay them, but all took care to avoid him; and meanwhile the dead woman's effects were produced by the doctor, who now took the foremost place.

Slowly and solemnly he emptied the contents of the large and the small bag into the grave; then the bags themselves

were cut up, and thrown in likewise. All that an aborigine has owned in life must be laid beside his body when he goes to his last home.

Then, in the arms of a stout fellow, Monana's body was borne to the grave, and with scant ceremony dropped suddenly into it, while above rang out the wild, weird, mournful cry of the priest, which being translated means 'Blood for blood!' or 'Life for life!'

An opossum rug was now put over the body, and the grave filled up with twigs and leaves, the corpse itself being hidden from sight by the broad sheet of bark being laid over all, and smaller pieces placed at the side to prevent the earth from touching the coverings of the dead.

Then, one by one, the mourners approached, and looked down, with features composed to the sorrow that a savage can simulate so much more admirably than his white brother; and, lastly, the men filled

in the grave with earth, using their hands or a stone tomahawk.

Then the sorcerer uttered a keen wail, in a very long, high note, gradually lowering the tone. This was joined in by all the women present, while the men followed it by a loud, deep bass groan.

As the sound rolled away in diminishing waves, the keen wail of the sorcerer followed by the women broke in; and as that began to dwindle in volume the deep groan of the men was again heard, and these sounds continually repeated for some minutes found the most exquisite expression of grief by sound that it is possible to conceive.

Then, all these things being over, Djarrah was conducted to his hut, and gradually silence fell upon the encampment, as though men and women alike were exhausted with the lamentation that had been called forth, not by love for the dead sorceress, but by fear of her.

CHAPTER XII.

Oh! cocks are crowing a merry midnight,
I wot the wild fowl are boding day;
The psalms of heaven will soon be sung,
And I, ere now, will be missed away.

TWILIGHT had fallen during these ceremonies, imperceptibly to Djarrah, to whom the day was as the night, and the night day. Infinitely more bitter than the thoughts of Yuntha were his as he sat alone in his miam, awaiting the punishment that in some intangible way he felt would fall more heavily on the girl than himself.

All through that long march homewards, those witch-hands never relaxing their clutch round his neck, the weight upon his shoulders growing heavier and heavier, he

had scarcely thought of what would meet them at their journey's end, so intense had been the joy of having her once more beside him.

When he had for the last time covered her flight with the Englishman, he never expected to see her again; and in this, indeed, he was right, for he had taken his last actual look at her that night. But where was the white man, and why had he suffered her to return alone to meet the vengeance of her tribe?

She had served the man—she had loved him—and this was her reward. The veins upon Djarrah's brow swelled almost to bursting, as, with clenched sinewy hands, he longed to be face to face with the man who had slighted Yuntha.

Slighted, not harmed; for by the tone of her voice, the very touch of her hand, Djarrah knew that however she might have suffered for love's sake, love itself had left no smutch or stain upon her.

It was all over now, and she would forget him—this lover who had come and gone like a light that flashed across a summer's sky, and in time . . . (here the savage's great heart trembled), she might have come to love, and put up with him, for they had loved each other from the first moment when as children they had clasped arms about each other's necks, and thenceforth been inseparable companions.

All the gentle training that she had received from the once coarse, rude gold-diggers who had watched her infancy, and the yet more valuable teaching of Billy, the child had unconsciously taught Djarrah, so that very early in his life the cruel, treacherous, and cowardly instincts of the aborigine were conspicuous in him by their absence, and in all essentials he was a civilised being.

Yet nothing could eradicate from his breast his hatred of the white race—for here, perhaps, Monana's influence stepped

in, and being ignorant as Yuntha herself of the white blood in her veins, knew not one reason why she should alter his bad opinion of them all.

It had been a just and natural impulse with him to seek to slay the man whom he had surprised in offering insult to Yuntha, but afterwards it had seemed equally natural to him to listen to her pleadings when she had implored him to save the Englishman's life, and if possible contrive his escape.

Yet to-night, in a paroxysm of rage against the man who had so basely rewarded Yuntha's self-sacrifice, the passions of the savage awoke with tenfold strength, and Djarrah cursed himself that he had not killed the wretch, instead of succouring him.

If he had left her body unharmed, he had stolen heart, soul, and spirit, all that was best in her, and had sent back the mere husk of a life to those who had fed,

and valued, and loved it. Only a husk; but how willingly would *he* have taken it, and by degrees built up a new life within it, so that in the days that were to come, she might perchance look across from her contentment to the brief madness that had possessed her, and smile at it as if she had only dreamed.

But no such happiness loomed before Djarrah's sightless eyes as hour after hour he sat erect with dead silence all about him, and thought of the morrow and of what her fate would be—the fate from which he could not save her, nor perhaps know the precise moment in which it overtook her.

Her beautiful limbs would be gashed with stones, and pierced with spear-thrusts, each woman who had been jealous of her beauty, each man whose love she had refused, would revile her; and before the breath had left her body, she would be cast into a dishonoured grave with a leaden

weight of earth upon her breast, and the worms for company.

Or she would be married to some old and hideous warrior who would meet her tears with blows from his waddy, and drag her by the hair to his miam, where after long continued cruelty she would become broken-spirited, and a patient drudge for her new master.

Or Monana had devised some new punishment more hideous than the rest, in that long harangue which had preceded her death, and that Djarrah had strained his ears in vain to catch, and she would simply vanish from their midst, and not a clue or a whisper ever reach him as to her fate.

Groping, he rose and felt his way to the aperture of his hut with some wild thoughts of making his way to her miam, and striving to compass her escape, but on his threshold he felt himself put back by an inexorable hand, while a word or two of

significant warning told him what madness it would be to go forward.

But as he returned once more to the rude couch that had held the Englishman, no instinct told him that yonder pale dawn strengthening to morning was his marriage day—the marriage day of himself and Kantha.

END OF VOL. II.

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